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PRISON JOURNAL 83

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

John Abbott: recently graduated from the Prison university program with a B.A. in History is one of the editors of the Prison Journal. His writing is a reflex to the anomalous world he finds himself in.

Cory Cardinal: is a girl imprisoned at Oakalla who has taken up the writing of poetry as a means to express how she feels.

Kenny Cound: a prisoner from Quebec who is probably unaware his story appeared in the Prison Journal as he had thrown it into the trashcan from whence it was retrieved by an enthusiastic editor.

Tommy Elton: has been writing poetry and prose for a number of years while serving his life sentence. At present he is the editor of the Mission Institution newspaper, while he finishes off his university degree in English literature. He intends to prepare an Anthology of Canadian Prison Literature quite shortly.

Brian Fawcett: a guest editor and a former instructor in the University of Victoria program, Fawcett is currently writing full time. His most recent books, 'Aggressive Transport', and 'My Career with the Leafs and Other Stories', are from Talonbooks.

Jon Furberg: is a poet, teacher and editor in Vancouver. His ten year struggle to translate 'The Wanderer' from anglo-saxon into contemporary english was recently published by Pulp/Arsenal.

Mark Hauser: felt his art should stand on its own.

Wayne Knights: is an academic teaching history with the University of Victoria program in prison. At some point in time he intends to finish his dissertation.

David Bourke: is a prolific prose writer who has found his vocation late in life in prison. Other works include 'Bisco: A Child's Progress', and a collection of short stories of which 'the Redford Look' is but one, soon to be published for distribution on the West Coast.

Norm Sibum: Of German-American descent, Norm has lived in Canada since the 1960's. For a number of years now he has lived in the Commercial Drive area of Vancouver, writing about what he sees from the point of view of an insider. His most recent work is contained in 'Among Other Voices in the Storm' (Pulp/arsenal).

Bill Scherbrucker: His first published volume of stories, entitled 'Chameleon', will be released by Talonbooks this fall. Until recently he was the editor of the Capilano Review.

Laurie Taylor: the article 'Ducking and Diving' was reprinted from a series of criminological articles he wrote in the journal 'New Society'. He is on the staff of York university in England.

Willi Wisely: is currently awaiting transport to Death Row from the Orange County Jail in California. He has been sentenced to death. Recently he has taken up writing.

Gregory Worobets: from Lethbridge Alberta, has added a stint in prison to his portfolio of life experiences. His love of music and aesthetics in general resulted in his involuntary confinement. His writings are but a small part of his artistic expression.

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EDITORS: PETER MURPHY AND JOHN ABBOTT

ADVISORY EDITOR: BRIAN FAWCETT

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Writing or Fighting

Politics

is saying hello
to someone you'd rather kick
in the nuts.

Every poet is
a prisoner
of his images.

Two Editorials

This issue of Prison Journal is a major expansion of our primary goals as set out in preceeding issues: to create a forum for an authentic dialogue between the prison and the "outside" world, and to break out of the false duality of "outside/inside" as applied to prison literature, a misapprehension that has often resulted in dismissing it as a freakish sub-genre, instead of enabling us to see it as an important example of the common bonds of language and art. The following comments by the "outside" guest editor, Brian Fawcett, and the "inside" editor, John Abbott, both underline, in very different ways, how the political dimensions of prison literature are always a central concern, even when the authors are ostensibly preoccupied with purely literary questions.

Peter Murphy

In any modern society, the way in which citizens are imprisoned for legally defined crimes reflects with remarkable accuracy the social and political values and the problems and inequities of the society. Canada is no different, and one can look to our prisons as a mirror for the contradictions that are currently at work in Canadian society.

For the University of Victoria program in B.C. prisons, and hence for the Prison Journal, this paradigm presents a particularly disturbing prospect, one that goes beyond the immediate concerns of the institutions involved or the students and faculty of the U-Vic program.

The U-Vic program has the same philosophical base as the liberal arts faculty of any university since the middle of the last century: as Cardinal Newman had it, to make people into competent citizens by educating them to the structure, values and purpose of the society in which they are living. As such, its aim is to provide its students with the intellectual technology that will allow them to make independent, complex and culturally competent decisions with society.

The recent cancellation of the Program by the Federal Government, presumably in a fit of economic and political fundamentalism, is indicative of a malaise that is currently considerably greater outside prison--that our governments are forgetting what the basis of a democratic society is: a competent citizenry.

What happens to the U-Vic program in the near future is therefore worth watching, not for sentimental or partisan reasons, but because of the paradigm it represents.

Across North American educational institutions, liberal education faculties are under pressure. The study of History and Literature in particular is being tanked in favor of subjects that relate directly to the economic system and its priorities. Perhaps most symptomatic of the general shift is the one occurring in the small colleges that were set up over the last two decades in recognition that the educational needs of the community don't end when students get their degrees. The function of these colleges increasingly is to serve the industrial and service job requirements of the business community (euphemistically referred to as the "job market").

Students now go to these colleges to learn business skills that are often obsolete at graduation along with such humane skills as how to buzz at the correct frequency during a job interview.

"Times are tough," say our political representatives. "We have to trim the fat from the system, remove the frills." All of this, they tell us, is in the interest of efficiency, and it will result in a better, leaner economy in which the innovative spirit that made us strong in the past can be renewed.

Such simplistic solutions are tempting, but they are so mainly because they seldom distinguish between the problem and the solution, and because they almost never examine the language they use to analyze the problem. Unless I'm mistaken we still live in a politically based system of human relations, not one aimed solely at economic well-being. In that context it may startle our economic planners and even many educators with short memories, but education in the humanities, in what have recently come to be called the liberal arts, is not a frill. The healthy functioning of a democratic society, particularly a libertarian democracy like ours, depends heavily on the understanding individual citizens have of the limits of personal liberty and on the social contract each of us makes with the society at large. The kind of efficiency governments are currently identifying as desirable may not translate from the economic to the social and political spheres, where the concept of efficiency becomes conceptually and materially more complex. Certainly crime is inefficient. It is also an indication of

cultural incompetence, an impatience in the face of liberty.

In a society aimed at achieving social justice criminal activity is a sign of educational failure, whatever else it may be saying. If, in prison or in society in general the cutbacks (that in the best sense are aimed at dislodging entrenched bureaucracy) cause the teaching of those academic subjects that enable people to cope with complex society to be thrown out or declared a frill and a privilege, then we will all be guilty of a myopic impatience that will border on social, political and economic insanity. The Dictatorship of the Entrepreneurs that will result (criminals are, in the end, sociopathic entrepreneurs) exact a cruel price, and one of the first places it will exact its toll will be in radical increases in the numbers of men and women wasting their lives, and the society's resources, in prison.

What you will find in this issue of the Prison Journal, is, in the midst of the immediate subject matter, the search for alternatives.

Brian Fawcett

The Fall

In the maze

Bobby S

a
n
d
s

refused

to turn
the hourglass

and f

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1.

Certain aspects of current prison literature retain a romanticism which has remained virtually unsullied since the 18th and 19th centuries: The depths of despair and the heights of ascetic sacrifice, Robert W. Service in the Yukon and Oscar Wilde in Reading Gaol, the common vein internalizes the essential struggle of man against the bonds of his society, into one of man challenging himself, plunging back and forth between the bitter darkness of despair and desolation and the hope or memory of love which keeps him going. The curious thing is that this tradition remains so prevalent in the 20th century; post George Orwell and his insistence on the political content of literature. Nowhere, when it occurs, is the absence of political content so noticeable as in prison literature.

Canadian prison literature seems to lack the dynamic political message discernable in writings from American prisons. One common aspect of the Canadian species of prison literature is an extreme romanticism and a curious simplicity which ignores the relationship between prisoners expectations in life and the reality of their position within society. The prisoners appear to condone and support the essential morality and the goals of the corporate oligarchy (the overwhelming focus on the acquisition of money and power) that is the operating mode in Canada. In effect this means that the prisoners believe the relationship of oppressor/exploiter to oppressed/exploited is as absolute as death and rain and that if there was to be any change at all it would be to reverse the roles, so that the hitherto ground-down, unaware prisoner has the gun in HIS hand, pointing it in someone elses' face, making them do what HE wants! Perhaps intuitively the prisoner has concluded that this is the actual relationship between the corporate oligarchy, its police, and the remainder of society, and so the romantically 'innocent' prisoner has attempted to emulate the rulers, and has been unfortunately slapped down and imprisoned because of it.

However on the conscious level of what actually gets passed onto the Prison Journal editors, most of the writings are maudlin requiems to lost love, ideal romances and the bitter cold walls of prison; there is almost no recognition of the relations which led to this sad impasse, rather a variety of strident complaints against the result. What does this indicate? One could assume that the process of being arrested, helplessly forced to watch the tragedy of criminal justice performed like surgery upon oneself, dragged off to prison, and finally to be extruded through the 'correctional' Parole Board's narrow die would have some kind of residual politicization effect. Presumably this politicization would be noticeable in the writings that emanate from the Canadian prisons, yet this is not borne out by the writings in this Prison Journal. It appears that, rather, the absolute power and the readiness to use it inherent in current justice and 'correction' has such an intense and traumatic effect on each individual, and the hegemony seems so apparently secure, that even if a prisoner made the connection between power-moned elite-police protection and poverty-police repression-prison, the last thing the prisoner would want to do is announce it in the Prison Journal, and be subsequently highlighted; it being much safer to describe every facet of the lover waiting or the concrete and razor wire, and hope for a sympathetic reaction. This conclusion may be somewhat harsh but the apparent lack of perception and unawareness of most Canadian prisoners and their tendency to become ever more entrenched in their comic book world of Ducking and Diving must have some sort of explanation.

Most of the poetry that passed through the editors' hands was of the forced rhyming couplet genre about the bars and the idealized girl,

or it was weird Christian devotional poetry. Although it would have been representational to include this stuff as it stands, we exercised the editorial privilege and instead overbalanced this issue of the Prison Journal towards prose. Tommy Elton's poetry however, deserves notice. He shows a careful appreciation of the limits of prison and social allegory within this controlled setting, while preserving a strong sense of outrage at the process he finds himself enmeshed in.

The term cultural hegemony has been coined to describe the extent to which a ruling elite has inculcated its values upon the mass of the ruled, and make them (the masses) want what the elite wants them to have, and no more. Cultural hegemony is established through education, the media and traditional custom; in today's TV society the goals and expectations of the mass of society are articulated by advertisements and the STAR system. For the prisoner, rejected from normal society and shunted into menial and poorly paying jobs, if there are jobs to be had at all, this becomes a cruel race: a race between his aspiration to have the same things it appears the 'right people' have, yet denied the legal avenues to approach them. The rags-to-riches dream is a firmly cherished hope, be it the big 'score', the big 'deal' or the big 'scam'--except that the prisoner has to make ever more desperate efforts against ever mounting odds to get his or her piece of the big capital pie. In this struggle to get back under the cultural hegemony of 'normal society', (normal being whatever standards the hegemonic combine embraces) the prisoner is torn between what is held out as possible--everyone has a chance in the land of the free, we have a Constitution etc--and his actual position in relation to the law, the courts and the other adjuncts of the State.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that prisoners on the whole do not see any viable alternatives: socialistic, cooperative or anarchistic, to this current configuration of the enormous business cabals, their politicians, and the uniformed guardians of their interests. Obviously this is an educational problem, because historically prisons HAVE been catalysts of politicization; be it anti-colonial, recognition of the class struggle or an appreciation of the racism and elitism inherent in the State. In the relationship between prisoner and guard, the velvet gloves are off and the relative positions are not blurred by any rhetoric or window-dressing. The guard is the boss; the prisoner is the worker. The perfect union as seen from the altitudes of the State is stasis: maintain the status quo. When the prisoner is humbled, has been co-opted or crippled by age in body or spirit, then that prisoner is ready for release to be a normal worker in society. This historical lesson is evident almost everywhere except on TV, which sadly enough, is the main educational resource those who end up in prison have had access to. When a man or a woman is restrained twenty four hours a day, for an indefinite number of years, in a cage like a monkey, "it is easy to see without looking too far that not much is really sacred."

The Prison Journal, published inside Matsqui Prison and checked for its compliance to the Commissioner of Correction Canada's Directives on 'inmate publications' is suitably defined and restrained. Earlier on this year the Solicitor General, Robert Kaplan, and the Commissioner had planned to end the University of Victoria contract for the Pacific Region prisons. The core of this program is the study of history, literature, political science, sociology and psychology--for most of the prisoner students it is the first exposure they have had to these areas as subjects of study. While a prisoner can viscerally and intuitively know that he or she is oppressed, the process of education must occur before the prisoner can clearly define the full extent of the oppression, its roots, its facades, its language and its methods. Clarity and awareness are necessarily rooted in knowledge. Temporarily

the program has been re-instated and the process of education can continue, but as Brian Fawcett has indicated, the trend in society and in prison towards a 'tunnel vision' acquiring of skills like small motel management and business administration, to the neglect of an understanding of society, its relationships and its history, suggest that those in charge would like to keep the blinders on the mule and simply have it pull ever harder at the load: another facet of what Gramsci, who himself spent several decades in prison, called 'cultural hegemony'.

Laurie Taylor's article, 'Ducking and Diving' acts as a flagship for much of the material that follows. "The fierce pulse of anti-social life" he refers to is reflected in various degrees in the stories 'Sci-Fi City', 'Looking for the Passing Lane', 'The Redford Look', and 'Friends'. Although Mr Taylor details some lurid British underworld vignettes which have entertainment value by themselves, his essential point is that it is only the 'pulse' or pace of the villains' lives that differs from the mundane tedium they assure themselves is worse than death and worth going to prison to avoid. Their values remain as traditional as those whom they have left waiting at the lights. And again, the villains are devoid of any political awareness, rather they have chosen to be a colorful group of nasty scavengers, edging around the table for scraps from the feast.

John Abbott

Ducking and Diving

Laurie Taylor looks back over his travels among the crime professionals.

I never got used to the violence. I would be sitting with John McVicar in this or that club, chatting to Geoff or Phil or Tommy about some detail of their criminal dealings, flicking the tape recorder on and off, glancing at my list of questions, when BANG BANG BANG--in came another horrific story about how Mike got smashed to pieces in a fight last night outside the Lansdowne, or how Ted and his brothers had knifed Big George at the dog track the night before. Even rather fastidious con men like Geoff would join in, pressing for more details, nodding enthusiastically at each twist and turn of the dramatically lurid description.

At least this stopped me from slipping into any sort of "loveable rascal" view of the underworld. There wasn't anything loveable about their stories, or their reception. At first some of the stories seemed so nasty that I assumed the teller was going over the top--that he was revealing some unfortunate pathological obsession. But I soon realized that nobody except me ever blanched. Neale's little story of how, at one time, he had sorted out some would be gangsters who were threatening his club, was normal enough to rate no more than a few understanding nods:

"I thought: Well, I've had enough of you cunts. You gotta do what you gotta do, and I had this little pen knife on me. And I could give someone some treatment. PHHOOO! I was on 'em like a fucking dose of...they said something to me...and I was on them like a dose of salts. Sticking right in their fucking head. About twenty times they was on the floor, bleeding profusely, with blood spurting up the walls, and then I done two more an' all I do for him. I do for HIM. Right away. Right up. In the throat. And one in the fucking eye." And as so often, there was more to come. Gangsters--whether would be or successful--come in families. So, once Neal had started, he had to go on with his campaign. The next night he was round to see the rest of his enemies. Face to face.:

"I said: 'I hear you're fucking looking for me. Well, you don't have to look for me. COS HERE I AM! Then I hammered the geyser in front of them. A spade. I did have him. I did see to him an' all--and I fucking give him one. And down he went, didn't he? With a blade protruding out of his fucking throat. He didn't feel to good then, did he? Over he went, didn't he? But I said, 'I hear you're looking for me' Cos I can see them, and I know they're bullies. And they didn't fancy anything else."

Much of this violence was there to enforce existing rights. No other legal or quasi-legal sanction could be invoked in a community of villains. So gangsters would be hired to protect gambling or drinking clubs, and get a share of the profits in return for their readiness to hand it out--or, more usually, as payment for a reputation which simply kept the troublemakers away.

But it is the nature of violence that it resists strict regulation. It gets out of hand. Becomes an end in itself. The Krays were always the favourite example. They--and in particular, Ronnie--went just that bit too far, even for most of the hardened villains at the Lansdowne. Phil summed up the general attitude.

"You see," he said, "Ronnie would really go over the brink. GO OVER

THE BRINK. And do more damage than he'd intended to do, and more than he should do--being a gangster...So people was absolutely in fucking fear of their lives with them. Nobody could say or speak anything. They went too fierce...And that was the trouble: 'Cos when you lose that with people, you've lost everything. I'll tell you why, 'Cos you'll never get the gist of nothing. When you've just got yes-men, you're in danger. You'll never get your cards marked."

I never heard anyone complain about the actual morality of the Kray's actions. The people they beat and shot were thought of as fair game: they had stepped out of line, and should have known better. It was just that too much violence, too much terror, might be tactically wrong. The limits were purely practical.

Self-righteousness

Not that anyone I met in my six months of trailing around with John McVicar could have been called amoral. Quite the contrary. I have never met a group of people who had such a pronounced sense of justice and right and equity, who spoke so much of principles and what was fair and reasonable. There was quite enough moral self-righteousness around to wallpaper a seminary.

Mike, for example, belonged to a rather smart health club in Mayfair. It was one of those executive gymnasiums where you are expected to exercise for half an hour before retiring to your own cubicle for a special massage and a large gin and tonic.

Recently the proprietors of this club had found out from somewhere (probably a police officer client) that Mike had done a spell in prison. He had been promptly excluded. "I mean! Is that fair? Because someone has been inside." This was directed at me, not John. Surely, as a criminologist, I should be properly outraged. "Because of what someone's done in the past? Don't you think it is diabolical?"

Well-YES. On the face of it. But hardly enough to have anyone searching for the phone number of the National Council for Civil Liberties. All of the crowd around us in the Lansdowne, who were looking equally shocked at the behaviour of the health club, knew full well that Mike was still an active villain, and had been out robbing that very morning. There were excellent contemporary reasons for excluding him from any straight club. But this didn't make a scrap of difference. The essential moral point was that the club had no way of PROVING this--and so Mike was innocent. Not just technically--but actually. It was, I suppose, a judicial morality, born out of dozens of courtroom experiences; a view of the world in which doing it and getting away with it didn't count. Because no one could prove it. And the hypocrisy of the straight world, that characteristic which made it so eminently suitable for plunder, was its readiness to suspect duplicity when none was apparent; to fabricate evidence when none was immediately available.

"Plunder" is just about the best word for the professional's attitude to his activity and his prey. Villains distinguish themselves from the "cowboys" and the amateurs by the SYSTEMATIC and WHOLESALÉ way in which they wrested profits from the straight world. Hoisters cleared complete racks of silk shirts: con men "worked" book after book of travellers' cheques; armed robbers cleaned out security vans; burglars emptied hundreds of country houses. Day after day. Week after week.

Lord Snooty's pals

And the evidence of the sorties into banks and homes and shops had to be just as flamboyant as the raids themselves. Always woggles of

notes-tens, twenties, fifties. Denominations which I had to peer at to distinguish would be casually picked off from a fat roll and left lying as payment on bars and restaurant tables. And if you were in the money, then you had to live a luxury life of almost comic extravagance: a Lord Snooty Rolls-Royce, a great DANDY roll of notes, a Desperate Dan magnum of champagne, and a BEANO-size cigar. I remember asking Geoff what he really liked about the life.

"Well, I'm a natural. I mean, I AM a natural. I love it. I love it. I love the high life...I love the...going out to wine and dine, the fucking champagne, and the birds, and living it up, and first class on the airplanes. Champagne fucking Charlie. You know. Ducking and Diving; and, you know, wining and dining."

"Ducking and Diving" is the other theme that kept coming through. Villains had to "stay sharp-right to the bottom of the glass." The belief was that, everywhere you went, there were gaps you could squeeze into: many of them created by those very hypocrites who were forever pronouncing on the infamy of professional criminals. Neal explained it to me:

"Everybody, whatever walk of life, they're looking for perks. Millionaires look for perks. They're all at it. They're all at the fucking cheating game. No matter where they are, they're cheating. All you gotta do as a villain is to look for what they're cheating at. And once you know what they're cheating at, where the readies are coming from, then you can move in."

Neal, like everyone else, called this (with no ironic inflection) "looking for clues": "When you ride about, you always find clues, always riding about, and if I see something-Ah, that's a fucking clue."

A Contagious frenzy

Everything in this world was sharpened up. You kept alert, moved quickly, stayed out late, drove at speed, made snap decisions. There was a contagious frenzy about it all. Everyone else was left standing at the lights. It was what Mark Benney in his 1930's novel, *LOW COMPANY*, nicely called "the fierce pulse of anti-social life."

This pulse was also what separated this crowd of villains, in their own minds, from the lumpen proletariat; from all those whose lives plodded between the fixed points of bingo-telly-Clacton-and the *NEWS OF THE WORLD*. It would have taken someone braver than me to point out how much the villain's ideal version of fast luxury living-with all its cigars and champagne and Rollers- was rooted in the very social stratum they affected to despise. "Don't be so superior," said one journalist who had listened to me for half an hour while I chatted away on in this way about villains and their values: their rationalizations; their sentimental East-Endery; their crass attitudes to women, and any form of sensibility. "They're almost due to become a protected species. The police are on to them. All those computer records on how they work, all those super-rats, and new ways of interrogation. And the profits aren't big. I doubt if altogether they take as much in a year as half a dozen big inside City frauds. There are probably more professional criminals pass across our television screen in a single year than actually roaming the streets of London. They're dodos compared to all the hooligans and bootboys and psychopaths."

Nobody down at the Lansdowne club ever felt quite so sorry for themselves. Part of being a professional criminal was being able to shrug off even the worst "knockbacks." You didn't discuss the odds against you, the prospect of prison: and when it came to the final reckoning, you didn't pretend you were other than you were.

On the last night I was there, Neal was talking loudly about a villain he had once worked with on a very profitable and long-running

job. As far as I could gather, it involved taking charge of parcels delivery at King's Cross. Both of them had got prison sentences for their part in it, but Neal's mate had insisted on going round the actual prison, and still pleading innocence. The governor had come to Neal to see if he felt the same way:

"Ah, Greenwood," he says, "Do you also say you're innocent in this matter?"

"INNOCENT!" I said, 'INNOCENT' BE FUCKED. Course I'm not 'innocent.' I've had it good now for five years. Plenty of fucking women. Good time I've had. So fuck ya."

In Your Eyes

When
I
look
in
your
eyes
and
say
I
Love
You
I'm
talking
to
myself.

The Neighborhood

The cabaret is stuffed with drinkers
and slow dancers.

I look in on that colony hidden
beyond the heavy curtains,
see too much heaven upheld there
and too much of men.

I cross the street, not greedy,
not desperately drunk.

Some nights,

I do not know what else to refuse.

Street alarms go off

as if to pinpoint the trouble.

The snow drives down unwanted
on the desire to sleep elsewhere.

By the dance studio I stand
still talking to myself.

The place is empty now.

The figure of the dancer

painted on the window

still points at the sky

as if a fever from there,

the moon gets us.

But most people believe

bad choices maim the dance.

the musicians must hold off

on a musician's paradise,

hands clapped to their faces,

feeding a fire.

I ask: who has not discussed
the neighborhood?

Who has not wanted

to push back the fires

let ordinary courage,

a few divine sparks show?

Who has not had belief--

then nothing, then quarreled

with the unimportance of their rage?

And who has not argued,

at every mental toss of a coin,

the fuss, the emptiness of disorder--

laughed and limped away

chilled to the bone?

Norm Sibus

Rob and his friends were considered members of the underworld by the police at the Hall of Justice. If this gossip was just bandied around liquid lunch at Magee's, it would have been inconsequential. However the police inspectors often walked down one flight of stairs and were in the District Attorney's offices. Unfortunately the D.A's were often quite enthusiastic when rumbled old inspectors sat down and shared their perambulations about the bad guys. This afternoon the bloodhounds at the Hall of Justice were in a fret over the results of the municipal elections for police chief, undersheriff and the like, so Rob and his friends had some respite from official scrutiny. On the overview Rob had been hoping, in a detached sort of way, that the big deal would appear suddenly, and he too, could afford a hillside retreat in cool Marin. This Saturday morning however he was standing on the street corner at Eddy, in the heat of the Tenderloin, listening to his friend Arlo.

Rob looked over Arlo's shoulder at the tiny tableau on the far street corner. A bone, distinct in an orange velour shirt and gloss black face was waving his hands in a young white girl's face like a pair of hungry crows. Arlo was still freewheeling along his sentence, "And ah, I stopped for a cup of tea at the Frankenfurter..."

Tea at the Frankfurter--this discordant image jostled the bone's distant pantomime for Rob's attention. He focussed on the gaunt architecture of Arlo's nose. While he stood there, Rob marvelled at how much he liked Arlo and the many things they had shared together, including Rob's last old lady--and the fact he bore him no ill will. Arlo the troubadour, he wore a matching black suit coat and pants and he was the only guy that Rob still knew who dropped LSD as casually as he sang to his plants. Arlo had something to say.

"...I was reading, "he paused, "This!" and he lifted a dog eared book for Rob to see. The edge of each page was grimy and distinct. Someone had painted a kaleidoscopic riot of mushrooms and trolls in rainbow marker colours on the end leafs. The formal covers had been torn out of their backings.

"BEING AND NOTHINGNESS, Jean Paul Sartre, see, it's on the back. And I met a girl."

The girl on the far street corner scuffed her bare foot along the back of her calves. The bottoms of her feet were very dirty. A mauve rope tote bag swung from side to side with her changing balance. The bone was pacing in front of her. Then he kicked a Pepsi can out in front of an oncoming transit bus. The bus ran it over and a smudge of greasy smoke fell like a shroud across the cars waiting behind it.

"And I nursed the tea for about an hour and a half as I was reading. It is a good place to sit. You know there is an ambience, a kind of competitor shadow that got what was left in locations after Ronald Macdonald did his population-consumer traffic flow charts. And they don't check my bag when I leave. Arlo smiled at Rob, as one past enthusiast of 'Steal this Book' to another. "Then this girl came over and sat down at my table..."

Rob was still gazing over Arlo's shoulder. The bus had finally broken its ponderous inertia and lurched across the intersection. Rob expected to see the girl still lounging at the corner, But they were both gone. The bone would be fast as a cockroach and into a crack. Often these black Josephs in their coats of many colours would stand, wrists cocked and eyes bulging in the matchbox doorways, waiting on some 'action', but this one's bobbing head wasn't floating near any of the light standards or riding the stoop of any one-door hotel stairway. Rob suddenly wanted to see that girl again, although he couldn't really remember if she was pretty or not. Her bare feet on the warm city

pavement had piqued his interest. As Rob dwelt on the moment, time periscoped around that tableau on the corner, slowed it down until the essential eternity of those impressions had been laid like an old record into his collection, then with the next blink, the couple were really gone, time ran fast and the buzz of Arlo's story began to make sense.

"...she asked me, 'Wanna take me home?'"

"What did she look like?"

"I had my ukulele with me. Then she said, 'Slow Train played a leetle guitar like that, commo'n, play something for me!' Her name is Dahlea, bluejean coveralls and Pro-Ked sneakers same as mine." Arlo looked fondly down at his well-stained sneakers.

"She said, 'I've been regrooved, so it's alright to be with me. Fresh Produce again, and she slapped her tits like this!' Arlo thumped his pigeon chest and it resounded like a bongo drum. "A Okay..."

"Are you sure you just hadn't eaten too many of maryjane's brownies?"

"No, this is straight from the Upanishads. She is a Sci-Fi original. Her panties are at the end of my bed. Orange plastic, all hearts with big tongues and snakes with cheshire smiles. When she asked me I just sat there, but it looked to be another long night so there really was no contest, in fact it was a fantasy come true. We had another tea together and she said it was easy for her to get into nothingness, her aura led the way and Jean Paul seemed like an old rich uncle after awhile..."

Rob was drifting a bit on this. Maybe he should go down to Arlo's hotel room and conduct a search for these panties.

"Let's walk," Rob interjected, "We've got to spread ourselves around."

Arlo bounced alongside like a spry Mr Natural in his dusty black suit, while Rob marched down Sutter Street with a soldier's steady measured gait, casting severe glances at himself in reflecting windows. Sometimes when he would see old faces peering back at him, he would reflexively look away, but he was always drawn back by the glass.

"You want something to eat Arlo? You know, some meat, eggs, good healthy animal fat. You look a little tired and low on gas."

Rob led him into a corner eatery with a 99 cent breakfast special sign on display. There were no customers and the Korean counterwoman seemed very glad to see them.

"Good Morning, Good Morning. Today special bacon and eggs." In Korea the dentist had used stainless steel caps and the cook's smile fairly shone like Saturday's washed fenders. Arlo brushed his tousled hair back over his shoulders and settled down onto the stainless tube-metal seat. Rob circled around and slid into the strategic corner pocket. The pneumatic features of a 1966 Coca-Cola poster girl gazed lubriciously at him through the grillnetting of the street side window. He suddenly realized that this busty picture was the backing for the breakfast special sign. A pretty Korean girl sailed out of a gust of coffee rich steam and quietly placed two cups before them. She smiled cheerily. Rob thought that times must be hard in the small restaurant business. The 7-UP clock hummed steadily on the wall. It was 11:47 AM. Arlo held his hot cup of coffee up like a chalice and gazed at the retreating petite shape. His eyes moistened like a puppies. Rob said abruptly,

"So she wasn't an Oriental princess?"

"No, Dahlea just got out of the psych ward. She said that the young doctors told her to find some new friends because her old set were causing her just too much heartache. She has scars on her wrists that she showed me when we took off all her spankles and loops. She chose

me. She said she read my aura."

Rob ruminated matter-of-factly on this new direction. It was as good a way as any to find a path. Right now the aura of the Korean counterman looked very good. The aroma of four eggs, perfectly symmetrical, and four strips of bacon rose above the sizzle and wafted over to their seats. He could actually see the grill and what went on it. No mysterious Tijuana meatburgers at this rest stop.

"Your aura hangs over you, something like the Northern Lights. Dahlea said mine was a melodic blend of green and aquamarine. Most people's sizzle like microwave radiation--it means they're just burning up inside. Mine was compatible so she came right over and introduced herself."

Rob was thinking his aura would probably blaze like the flash and smoke off a welding rod. Maybe it is better that too many people don't have this sight. No wonder she tried for the big sleep and ended up in the bug ward.

The eggs had come and Arlo, not the retiring vegetarian this morning, mashed his toast into the smiling face arrangement and gobbled the result up. Arlo smoked cigarettes sometimes and wrote messages and poetry on the inside of the packets. Several sweated remnants were stuffed into his handkerchief pocket. Perhaps songs for Dahlea. The suit had belonged to a lawyer before they had liberated it. Rob made a point of using his knife and fork fastidiously, if only for the Koreans, who were keeping a warm eye on their guests, and who would be swift to remember any barbarian manners.

After breakfast Rob leaned back and rubbed on the wrinkles that ran the arms of his levi jacket. They wouldn't flatten out but he liked the feel of the rough texture under his fingertips. Arlo had fished out a harmonica and was softly blowing the low keys. Slatted rays of the noon sun played across the flat plexite tabletop. One fly lazily circled around the clock. 'Spoonful of your Love'. Arlo sucked in the low moaning strokes. The Oriental princess brought on a new glass bulb of hot coffee. As she poured she automatically smiled; the process of assimilation was slow but she was trying. Rob was very relaxed. Across the street the Catholic Shelter was slowly disgorging some old people on walker canes. A pair of them very tentatively looked around, their thin necks tremulous like those of young robins--Today's decision, up or down the street.

Rob remembered that the waitress of the Chinese Silver Dollar cafe had been raped in that doorway. She was the daughter of the owner. He could recall his face but not hers. The doorway looked very peaceful now. A sober looking woman in gray and cream green, with severe black shoes, picked her way down the steps. She was still too young to be a resident. The nuns don't wear their habits on the street, so she must be a nun. Sometimes Rob was overwhelmed with the thought that his mind was a ragbag of disconnected thought, all jumbling down the road, overtaking each other, like passing cars on the LA Expressway. But it was quite tranquil in the eatery, just gazing out at the stream as it past. Arlo was speaking again.

"She had me put my hands on her crotch and her lower back and squeeze. 'Can you feel it? That's where my kundalini rests. It's asleep now but you are going to wake it up.'"

"Kunda what?"

"Her kundalini--it is the center of her love power. We practised some hyperventilation on the floor but I couldn't keep it up because of the wine we had drunk. Instead she had me listen to her body with my ears and taste her with my tongue."

"Food for thought, Arlo, food for thought. Alright!", Rob made like he was casting Cinderella's spell.

"It's not happening at Henry Africa's anymore, no! The scene is the

Frankenfurter's for alternate sex with the enlightened. Sounds like you grounded a live one."

Rob paid the counterman, who smiled widely, gave them two toothpicks and invited them back in the evening. "We have dinner special too. Tell your friends. You bring some we give you free meal." The Oriental princess had a brush in her hand with which she tried to brush off Arlo's suit, but he scooted out the door before any damage could be done to his antiquarian appearance.

It was High Noon in the slipstream.

"The apartment's ready," Rob stated when they got outside, "The phone even works. I called Ma Bell and told her I was Feinberg's brother who really owned the place, and to cancel on the cancel notice. They wanted me to show up in person but it should be Okay for a month or two. Until Feinberg gets the bill, but I think his mail is forwarded to Cincinnati."

Rob glanced towards Chinatown. The girl with the dirty feet was perched on a trash dumpster halfway down the next block. She had rolled some army fatigue pants up around her knees and was drumming her heels against the flat metal side. Rob couldn't hear the roll from this distance but his attention was fascinated by the white skin that showed through the dirty streaks.

"Rob?"

"Yeh."

"I'm going up Market to Dahlea's. She took my ukulele with her so I had to come back to her place later. She knows the guitar, so we'll play together. Is eight at the hotel alright?"

"St. Pauls, "Rob tentatively queried.

"Yeh, down by the pyramid building, next to the kung fu movie house."

"O.K. Arlo, I'll bring some help and the station wagon." But Rob didn't really think Arlo had much that needed carrying. Maybe he should try to lift that old iron bedstead. No, that wasn't Arlo's energy and the chinese in the office watched the stairs like a store dick. Arlo bounced off up the street and Rob immediately looked for Suzy the dumpster girl as he had just christened her.

She was walking languorously away on the arm of an elderly gentleman. He had a firm shock of white hair, but no cane. The couple looked as incongruous a pair as he could imagine, but the scene was so measured and natural that Rob couldn't notice a loose thread in it. That made him think of Paula. The street hustler's payphone was empty for a minute so Rob strode over and made a call.

"Jade Palace Massage Parlour. Can I help you?"

"Is Paula there?"

The voice turned from tour guide pleasant to backstreet flat. "Wait a minute." Paula's tentative voice came over the wire.

"Hello,"

"It's Rob. How's business?"

"Wait a minute, Suzy Wong is right by the phone. Oh Bob, I'm glad you called. It's boring, really dull, no customers at all but a chinese who's crying to Sheila that he's lost all his money gambling and can't afford love anymore. He is afraid of his wife and he just won't leave."

Her voice got indignant. "It's unfair, Suzy Wong answers the phone and she gets all the good customers. You know each time a customer calls from the airport it's worth two or three hundred dollars, nice hotel room, drinks. All I've done today is a handjob worth \$35."

"Hey, it will go better tonight. The businessmen are all out on business. After six or seven there'll be a flood of them at your door, paying to get in."

Rob was already bored with this conversation. Paula was complaining.

Sure it was boring, but all she ever did at home was eat pills and stare at the ceiling. He was just about fed up with her listlessness and lack of enthusiasm. What's the difference. At the Jade Palace she'd get paid for it.

Another Joseph was outside the phone booth grimacing and tapping his feet.

"Hey babe, gotta go, I'll pick you up at the usual time."

Click.

He stepped out and the Joseph muttered under his breath, "I got business to do man, business."

The heat shimmered on the edges of metal. The pavement was a dry iron. The shadows between the cars crept low as lizards, still and watching. Rob leaned back against a warm hollow block wall and shut his eyes. The poet girl he knew at the publishers called it Summer daze. He didn't have a job and he didn't have any place he had to be. Last week when Carla's date asked him what he did, Rob was nonplussed and unable to reply clearly. He had tried the broad title 'businessman', but the date latched on like Sherlock Holmes and wanted to know all of the particulars.

Businessmen sold things. They had to know their product. How many inches, what the strengths and fatigues were, costs and current controversies with the consumer advocates. Carla's date had been Hymie the lawyer.

'Well Rob, Windsurfing, that's really interesting. I'm sure you're familiar with the case law in California vs Harmon Sunsports Incorporated--right on point. What did you think of that decision?' 'Oh sure Hymie, I've heard it mentioned somewhere but I'm in the distribution end of the business. We let the lawyers handle the exotic details.' Rob hoped that Hymie hadn't thrown him a ringer.

'Exotic details is putting it lightly. There was a third party component which drove the defendant's windsurfing company into receivership. That's not something anyone in the field can casually ignore. Let me have your card and I'll send the relevant material over.' Hymie paused for breath, 'It is amazing how unaware business people are about critical problems in their field.' Hymie frowned.

'No, it's O.K., I, uh, don't have any cards with me now. They've all been handed out to my customers.'

Hymie was relentless. He obviously had a career ahead of him as a prosecutor.

'Well, Do you know Eddie Rosenberg? If you have been in the business for any amount of time you couldn't have missed the name. He's been in windsurfing before the trendy magazine editors had even heard of it. Eddie was right at the core, in the beginning, when Sandy Robbin and Lank Danskin developed the concept down in Santa Monica. Christ, Eddie and I go a long way back.'

Rob had started to squirm. He chose windsurfing off the cuff because it looked like the last thing this pale hebe would know anything about. Carla was staring at them now and Hymie's raucous voice was attracting the crowd's attention. In desperation Rob splashed his Bloody Mary all over Carla's caftan.

'Wow, sorry about that,' and he reached over and tried wiping the slops off her wet breasts. Hymie immediately intervened, grabbed her arm and they rushed off looking for Mr Clean. So Rob temporarily escaped. Now as he leaned up against the wall reviewing that gaffe, he realized he had to come up with a better occupation for the next party. And for the police when he next got picked up for questioning.

A loud voice breached his reverie.

"Hey Rob, Get off the nod! Wake Up! It's business."

Rob surfaced and quickly glanced around. A sparkling white Monte Carlo had stopped in the traffic right in front of him. The sunlight

glittered off the perfect weather-guard-polywax finish. Who do I know that polished their car like that? Then simultaneously he saw the white jean leisure suit and the long dark nose. Skrine's smiling face was beckoning like an album cover. Skrine gestured his invitation like an arab street vendor.

Rob was immediately awake. "Hey, is this ride hot?"

"No," Skrine grinned indulgently and made like his hands were burning. "Just rented. Come in, come in. Opportunity knocks and I have an interesting proposition for you."

One mystery was solved and another had just appeared. But a good proposition would fill in the gaps until the evening and their customary feast.

"Sure Skrine, What's up?"

"I am, about ten feet tall. Check these out," Skrine jammed the car in gear and ran a yellow light. In the same motion he flicked two keys on a swift mercury ring into Rob's lap.

"Whose house?", Rob asked.

"Not a house, Ma Bell's box. Her boxes, all of them in this whole wide world of Northern California."

Rob waited for more explanation. Skrine's eyes were glittering and he rapped at a forced fast pace.

"An old connection, Gary, dropped by. He laid these on me. Says every pay phone from Tahoe down to Concord is empty. He got tired of packing all of the silver. What goes around comes around. Ma Bell robs everyone at phone point--now we get ours back. Gary says, Burn San Francisco and then pass it on. Run it up and down the coast till the collectors are following each other around playing pin the tail."

Rob was focussing instinctually on the oncoming traffic. Skrine liked to boast about all the cars he had wrecked and all of the wrecks he had survived. The rear ends of trucks were whizzing dangerously close by as Skrine passed on the inside in the cargo unloading lane. The flower van, directly in front of them had suddenly stopped.

"Whoooa!" Skrine took his hands off the wheel and leered madly like a pirate as Rob frantically leaned over and jerked the car back into the cruising lane. Rob put Skrine's hands back on the controls.

"Hey Kapo, curb the coke monster. We're going to wreck at this pace."

Skrine suddenly pulled over at a Doggy Diner and sped into the lot. He stamped the automatic brakes and the car jumped still like a jet on a flight deck. A smouldering phone book lay outside a beaten phone booth.

Skrine grabbed the keys. "Wait and Watch cabron." and he leapt out of the front seat, stood up and straightened out his white suit. He regally kicked aside the smoking yellow pages and folded the booth door shut behind him. Rob thought of aquariums; a big fish in a small tank. A grey no-chrome Ford with two guys and a stub antennae slid by. Rob rolled his neck slowly to keep the narcs in view. He suddenly felt like a fly on the table by the sugar bowl, his eyes not lucid enough to distinguish the ominous dark shapes looming above him. Mad Skrine and his scream white car, not even cradling the phone receiver while he fiddled with the coin box. Jesus! Rob shook his head as a dance of shivers ran up his ribs. An old black man with a Doggy Diner mutt hat on, poured buckets of some gray brown muck into a huge barrel at the back door. Rob counted eight buckets lifted, swung and poured. He was a neat mechanical man working for a living.

Skrine was back in the car and revving the engine. They swung out into the street without signalling.

"Well?"

Skrine was concentrating on his driving. He stared out of the windshield with a fierce intensity. Rob's questioning note hung in the

air and then pitched down like a spent balloon on the seat between them. Skrine wasn't talking; he was a race car driver again. The car jolted around the corner onto Stockton Street and sped through the tunnel. Graffitti on the greenish tilework read VIVA LA LUCHA, then nothing as Rob lost sight of the rest of it.

Into the light and modern Chinatown. The street was clean; Clean pagoda style post office, plump Chinese doctors and their sons driving immaculate new mercedes. Skrine was re-accelerating into a busy intersection.

"Hey, Pull Over. This is my stop. California Street." Screech!

Skrine could stop faster than a streetcar. Rob popped out before the captain could change his mind then the great white fish was gone again, twisting in the stream. Rob turned into the tall shadows and the wind on the leeward side of Knob Hill. He began marching up the steep incline. How many more Skrines were out there, skidding across the corners in their race against the clock. If there were too many more of them, every intersection would be an ambush and all the traffic would soon be in the junkyard.

Rob wondered if Arlo was making it right now with his bruised flower. Do not bend, spindle or mutilate. Damaged goods. Disparate images crowded in on his mind: Arlo getting smothered by a wild kundalini, Dahlea, with no face because he couldn't imagine one yet, on her eight arms crawling around like a centipede. Arlo with his bones bent like pipestems, asking Rob politely, if he would please bend him back into shape. Rob walked the length of the shadow of one of Sci-Fi city's most prestigious hotels, fogged in by such thoughts. At the top, another of a long line of staid black limousines was pulling into the little circle at the front of the hotel. The doormen and drivers were slow and precise figurines bending to their toymaker's elaborate dance. Rob felt vaguely uneasy watching the doors being opened and shut. They should be doing it themselves, he thought. At what plateau were these guys concerned with, If someone had to open their doors, choose their food, nurse them to orgasm. What a scene. Rob glanced around at the circle of exclusive clubs and expensive hotels. The big boy's monopoly: who do I pay for an afternoon tryst in the purple hotels at Eddy and Golden Gate. Who did not get invited to the chateau on Pacific at Green? Poor people take a ride on urban transit, Go directly to the Hall of Justice, do not score, do not collect any food stamps.

Rob leaned against the mock marble esplanade stonework and wondered if there was enough satisfaction in the game to warrant the dance. The fog was staying seaward of 19th avenue, that high tinny sun shone the same over the bodegas in the Mission as it did on the tired eyes in the penthouse suite of the Fairmont Hotel, Sci-Fi city.

A crimson plastic raincoat walked out from under the hotel awning and ducked the blandishments of the half circle of cabbies. Rob followed her firm cupped ass across the street with his eyes, reading the tight stitching of the red plastic knee boots, the stony glitter of her heels and the respectable coiffed grey hair of the gentleman who opened a BMW's passenger door for her. Tricks are for kids or was it another serious extramarital romance. Rob idly wondered if this comfortable path was one Paula would like to lay down on. Fantasies and energy, lots of the first and none of the latter. If I could just wake her up. The night before last she had shown a glimmer; she came home at 3AM after a busy night and suddenly the sex was electric and passionate. But how to duplicate that complicated equation. These girls should come with instruction manuals, Rob concluded.

He crossed the street in front of a cable car that was laboring up the hill. The bells were ringing. Success or failure. He stared at a tourist who was pointing toward him. Go ahead, take a picture and then

describe in your banal way what you saw, and I'll be something between the two. He gave the tourist the finger anyway and threw his feet out like an asphalt cowboy until he was safely across to the opposite sidewalk. Time to take a shower and wash it all off.

At six o'clock Rob wished he had taken that shower. Somehow Pat had beguiled him with another business tale and they had chased it all afternoon, until after an hour of waiting, the receptionist at one of the shakers and movers' offices had told them, 'He's in Aspen. Come back next week. But phone first. ' Right.' Pat had interpreted this as a sign that things were in motion in the big money playground, but Rob's gut feeling said, 'Don't call us, We'll call you.' If he had to hang around like a beggar to get on the board, maybe he didn't want to play. Shit. Now I am going straight home and clean off.

When Rob slipped into the living room he immediately noticed that someone had the whale music on the stereo. Whreeee, and then some long resounding echos. All these fat whales with their little pinny eyes telling stories like pawnbrokers on a party line. Rob peered over the edge of the mound of party pillows and saw Kitten industriously rubbing someone's feet. Her electric faun hair was reacting to all the static cling in the air and was spun out all over her shoulders. The tendons in her working hands stood strong and white as she ran her thumbs into the neat brown insteps. Ron realized he didn't recognize those feet. He circled the soft blocks. Oh ya, Wally the apartment manager.

"Hey Wally, how's the energy?"

Wally's handsome sephardic face lay calm and smooth as a bowl of salad oil. His dark eyes flicked open.

"Hi Rob," he rolled his eyes backward, "There's ginseng tea on the table." Kitten stayed on the job, every so often crooning softly when the whales let out a particularly plaintive moan. Obviously Wally was quite used to this treatment; he had a peaceful imperturbable pose that told of many slow tidal nights, relaxing in secure circumstances, in what Wally called 'The Way'. Wally closed his eyes. His granny glasses twinkled with a strolling bit of loose sundown light. Rob looked over at the snug little teapot. Stuff tastes the same, hot or cold, he thought, as he went towards the bathroom to strip off. He made a future reservation for himself with Kitten, it was apparent she did good work. Woooooo...somewhere in the Pacific an amorous whale was chasing a supertanker. Whoosh, Rob stepped into the hot shower and he was back on the level again.

A few hours later the folks had collected back at the apartment. Rob was making plans with Pat.

"Here's the schedule Pat." Rob adopted his street commando tone, "We drive down to Arlo's hotel and get some practical experience in the moving industry while the girls paint on some good looks, then everyone goes out to dinner courtesy of BankAmericard." He grinned widely. Eating out was always fun with such disparate company as Arlo, Pat, Kitten, Paula and himself. Perhaps Linda and Skrine would land and come along for some surface travel. Pat disappeared into the back bedroom.

Rob looked around at the court. Paula wasn't talking to him today. There she sat ensconced in front of the beauty table, wreathed in little bright lights, laying down make-up with Linda. It wasn't that she wouldn't answer when he asked a direct question.

'How much money did you make?'

'Not enough.' dull sulk, Hmmm.

Linda was notorious for not talking at all. Pat said she understood body language really well, but Rob hadn't crossed wires with her yet. And now Paula wasn't confessing to him anymore, no intimate little

stories, none of her gems of quiet expression. Rob was aggravated. This could be a time for romantic despair but it really wasn't in his nature. Suzy the dumpster girl, Suzy of the dirty feet. How would she relate? He wondered what she did on rainy days.

Finally Pat came out of the bedroom, with his chocolate pastel blowdryer hanging from his gunfighter's grasp. His brown hair was fluffed, waved and laid back down as carefully as thirty minutes of minute attention in front of the mirror could make it. His long leather coat shone down to his knees, the same smooth tone as his alpaca range boots. Rob thought he dressed like a caricature but Pat's associates didn't have the same inside track that Rob had. That year Pat had been relatively successful with his presence: this actually meant that connections would front him briefcases of dope until they got to know him better.

Rob stepped over to admire the sartorial precision. Their destination, the St Paul's hotel was in a race between biodegrading or falling to the current real estate trend, the hi-chic office building. They were not going out for cocktails. Maybe Pat just planned to hold the doors open. Rob put his street uniform back on and steered Pat away from one last look in the mirror.

The early evening shadows were already dancing with the heady city colours. Block to block was a different movie. Carol Doda still had the biggest tits because her huge pink neon outline dared you to compare. The barkers were steering chunky fans in for thirty-two dollar drinks and a transvestite's come-on. Columbus and Broadway, crossroad of America. As they drove past Rob remembered that the same bandit had robbed the corner B of A twice that week, riding away into the sunset both times in a Yellow cab. Suddenly Pat interjected.

"Those two dudes beside the wine truck. Remember their faces. Tall one's Tommy T--he's the man down here, Clubs, coke, the games. A cold boy."

Pat eased into silence and concentrated at running the streak of green lights at a steady 31 miles per hour.

"St Paul's to the right." Rob whispered. This wasn't a hotel that advertized much beyond a dim sign in a dark doorway, but next door the kung fu theatre glittered in chrome, white and streaks of blood red. There were always mugshots of the latest yellow supermen and the girl next door that they would beat a bus load of Phillipino thugs to death for.

Pat jerked the station wagon into his reserved parking spot, the fire hydrant red zone. As they leapt from the car Rob caught a glimpse of a huddled figure in the next dark doorway. The St Pauls did not have a doorman, he mused as he pulled back the heavy spring door and bounded up the narrow staircase. He felt good doing something physical. He prided himself and his choice of shoe on not making a sound on staircases and gravel, but nevertheless a little beetle chinaman was peering out of a circle cut in some murky glass at him.

"Hey Pat, Zippy the Pinhead comes to City Hall."

Pat was somewhere else although Rob could hear the steady clump of his bootheels on the wooden steps behind him. The air smelt of some pervasive fishy odour. The stairwatcher stared at them unblinking as they passed by his window. Pat didn't like talking to 'gooks' as he called them, they reminded him of ARVN, claymores and snipers. A toilet discharged somewhere above their heads and its load crashed through the pipes on its journey down to the harbour. Rob was startled and he looked up. The ceiling plaster was stained and mouldy like sour old milk. He tried to count the room numbers but after one and three, the rest were gouged or torn off. Maybe the residents did not want anyone to know their numbers. A door scratched open up ahead. A

skinny emaciated white man walked naked down the hallway and turned into an open door. The dragon tattooed on his back had lost its scales and turned a smudged dark blue. Its red mouth had faded to a sickly yellow. Rob stepped past the reedy footprints and remarked to Pat.

"Second from the end on the right, the Mayor's Office."

Rob made the corner with a slightly heightened step as the tinkle of twangy ukulele music changed the colours of his mood. He suddenly felt elated: it was Arlo. The door was open and there was the troubadour smiling wistfully, his head and neck curled over his dark ukulele. Arlo played a final trill as Pat filled the doorway.

"Welcome, welcome. What's mine is yours." Arlo waved vaguely at the tight little room. The old bald bed had edged over most of the room like a big crab. The one window was smeared and opaque with dust. A skeleton of a sink stuck out of the opposite wall. Rob thought of a prison cell, but the feeling was different because Arlo was the original freewheeling spirit and Rob couldn't imagine him inside; with the music, the wandering, the high endless sky, composing poetry and letting it fall out of his pockets, Arlo nursing a tea at the Frankenfurter, it was a magical puzzle he could never remember seeing in prison. As Rob stood there gazing absentmindedly at the fixtures, Pat shouldered Arlo's navy bag and Arlo stuffed the rest of his dirty clothes into his rucksack. That was it. Rob realized that Arlo carried his life on his back—he did not need any help moving on. Rob relaxed. There was a little rainbow candle half melted into a saucer. Old roaches had been jammed into the frozen wave of wax. It reminded him of the flies-in-amber exhibit at the museum. Rob lifted it up carefully like an icon, and maintaining a ceremonial step, carried it out and down to the car, this relic to a new age.

Arlo must have prepaid his rent because no one chattered at them when they filed down the stairs. Pat held the door of the station wagon open, but Rob went around to the other side and got in himself. Arlo bowed slightly and said to Pat.

"Thanks for the help but I'd like a crosstown walk tonight."

Rob smiled but Pat blinked like a lizard; Rob knew that Pat never walked anywhere when he could drive; that was the nature of his species. Arlo smiled warmly over at Rob, gave his hair a toss and stepped off through the shadows towards the lights at the far intersection. As Mr Natural made tracks, Rob noticed someone standing still in Arlo's wake. It was a girl. Somehow she was familiar. Pat slid in behind the wheel and put his Texas driver hat on. The girl edged out of the dark and stood still beside the driver's door. She was posed like a refugee. Pat and Rob both looked at her face. Her hair was long and glistened greasy in the bluish street light. Her face was flat and expressionless like a Noh mask. Her voice came from some dispossessed place.

"Would ya like a date?"

Pat turned and looked blankly at Rob. She was wearing an old man's coat.

"Twenty. Be more for both of ya."

Rob's mind was in a whirl. Her tone was so asexual he didn't know what to think. Pat turned away and muttered something. Rob quite suddenly could see bending her over Arlo's metal bed, pulling her khakis down over her knees and just fucking her cold; No names, no places in common. Before this train of thought could speed any

further, Pat spun the key and geared the car out into the empty street.

"Later," he yelled out the window. Pat flipped his fingers out like he would call a waiter, then leaned over towards Rob.

"Did you want to?"

Rob craned his neck and looked back at the dark block. He caught a glimpse of white about where her feet should be. Just maybe...

They drove straight home, picked up the folks and enjoyed a slightly frantic party at a restaurant hidden below Coit Tower. There was much chuckling throughout about how the bill would be paid. Finally the Bank of America footed the tab, albeit against their wishes. Rob felt vaguely uneasy. Maybe they should have lingered awhile with the girl. He couldn't make up his mind about how he felt. Had he missed something important? Was there a point for him in her isolation? It felt unfinished. Rob didn't feel anyone else in their party noticed his disquiet. Not that it mattered. So the day past.

At City Hall the politicians had been notified as to what the newest power configuration was going to be. When the news filtered into the Hall of Justice, the air cleared and the hounds went back to their desks to return to the job of pruning the underbrush. If Rob had been a pilot he might have said that Saturday's interlude was just the calm before the storm.

John Abbott

Jack phones, to ask further instructions about how to play Pinocle. That's easy enough to do, okay, and I tell him what he wants to know, and after some small talk about getting together soon, I hang up, grinning. Things weren't always so easy as this common domesticity we now know now we're both living in another city with jobs and marriages. When I see him I still feel a twinge of uncertainty about his size, his bearing. Jack is a large man who walks on his toes and waddles, and will one day be bald and probably fat.

I don't think about that. I think about elbows and knees, and about faces and broken teeth. This is because Jack owns my teeth.

Jack and I are different kinds of men. I've always been skinny and a yapper, and Jack was, uh, well over six feet tall at birth, and has never needed to talk to anyone.

The other difference used to be nearly fundamental. Jack was always a nice person, got along with his friends and family, modelling himself after his father. I was a nice person too, except that I couldn't get along with anyone, least of all my family. The fact that no one but me thought I was nice didn't faze me in the least--I was too busy talking to notice. Jack did notice.

There were never any direct threats, but Jack had his way of letting me know I wasn't his favorite person. I responded to that by staying out of his way as much as I could. That wasn't easy in a small town, but it was easier than keeping my mouth shut would have been.

A fight, were there to be one, would have been a non-title affair between a reasonably good heavyweight and a mediocre lightweight, and Jack possessed a clear sense of the order of such things. He fought big men like himself, and won at times, lost at other times, having made a fair and silent account of himself. The only time I fought without being cornered was with my father and I always made sure everyone knew who the villain was.

One spring I left home after a fight with my father, moved into a small shack that belonged to one of my father's enemies, and began throwing parties so my friends could have an occasion to drink and I would have a forum for yapping. Jack came to the parties, and one night cornered me and told me he'd punch my head in if I didn't stop badmouthing everybody.

Until that moment I'd never seriously considered a fight with Jack. But I stopped ignoring the idea as Jack began to actively bully me, breaking into my shack at all hours of the day and night, driving his old car around inside my yard and generally making fun of all my beatnik pretensions. He threw parties at my house, and brought some very large and unfriendly people around to, well, look down on me.

I got some concrete blocks and spaced them around the yard, but he merely collected them and piled them on my bed after one demolished the bumper on his car. When he took to using my bed as the dumping ground for his empty beer bottles I decided that I'd had enough--I was going to have it out with him.

The only problem was that I couldn't beat him in a fair fight, and I wasn't about to risk using a tire-iron or a beer bottle, lest such measures fail and I be killed with my own weapons. I fantasized about drugging him, but the only drug I knew about was the diluted marijuana I'd acquired during a trip to the coast, and that wasn't about to put anyone to sleep.

One night, at one of my--or his--parties, I stumbled onto the opportunity I'd been looking for. Get him drunk, I thought, and stay sober myself, and even things out that way. He got very drunk indeed, and without my help. I drank nothing, and cunningly smoked some of my

marijuana, thinking in those early days of the Revolution, to sharpen my wits with it.

From my elevated consciousness I watched Jack carefully, and when he emptied his beer into his own lap without noticing, I deduced that he was drunk enough.

I poked him in a friendly sort of way. "Hey, lets go outside for a minute."

Jack rolled off the chair onto the floor and leered at me. "Yah," he said, "Hah hah, what are we going to do? Have it OUT?" "Hah hah," I said, and helped him up and followed him as he staggered out the door. I watched him wheel around the yard as if he were trying to navigate by the stars, and announced that it was no joke.

"I've taken enough of your crap," I snarled. "Let's get it over with right now, for once and for all."

Jack's eyes narrowed with an alarming coherence, and then there was glee in them, and then some real viciousness crept into the glee, and as I was pondering my enlarged perceptual capacities Jack's utterly sober voice broke through.

"Okay, smart guy," he said, "let's just do that. Let's have it out."

He took his coat off with exaggerated care, and I didn't try my standard trick of slugging him while he was doing it. My plan was to not mix with him, work on his lack of co-ordination, and generally play toreador with him as the bull. In my condition of hyper-awareness I was sure I would be able to dodge all his drunken charges and hit him as he went by until I knocked him senseless.

I drew him out into the grassy yard where I had plenty of room to dodge and run. Sure enough, he charged wildly at me, and I stepped aside and creamed him: Ole! He stopped, turned looking mildly puzzled, and charged again. Whack. Ole! What fun, I thought.

All of this worked for five or six passes. I marked him up a little, drew some blood, cutting him over one of his eyes. But he didn't fall down when I hit him--as a matter of fact he didn't even slow down. I started to think about all that, and I slowed down instead, and he began to see what he was doing. It began to dawn on me that I was going to get hit in this fight too, and while I was thinking about that he charged and his shoulder caught my hip and sent me flying backward through the air and I landed on my ass hard in the grass. Jack started chasing me, and I tried to wriggle away, rolling around and kicking my legs in the air, trying to get up so I could make a run for it, thinking that the son of a bitch could kill me, and as that thought reached technicolour and cinemascope proportions I was uprooted by the pantleg, stood on my head--for a moment I could see the stars beneath my feet--and then I was on my feet. Bang went a fist off my forehead and I was seeing only the stars, but then a face blocked them out, (O Joyous Cosmos come back!) and then a fist, bigger than the cosmos, was hovering over my face.

"For Christ sake," I squealed, "Don't hit me I give up I can't take you don't hit me!"

Jack hesitated. "I'm going to punch your teeth down your goddamned throat," he said, in the loudest and deepest voice I had ever heard.

"Please don't," I whined. I would have cried, but the terror of the thought of my teeth being smashed in was so physical I'd forgotten how. "Please don't do it, man, don't do it," I pleaded. Oh God, I thought, and closed my eyes, wondering irrelevantly if I would see stars.

There were no stars. I heard sobs instead, and opened my eyes to the starry night and Jack.

"I can't do it, god damn it, I just can't, it's like my brother." He stopped, and his voice cleared. "Get up."

He pulled me up, almost tenderly, and I got to my feet, stumbling around a little with sheer fright, not touching him and not knowing

what to do or what to say.

"Uh, thanks, man, uh" I said quietly, feeling grateful and subdued, and very aware of my teeth, making a mental note to brush them more often, maybe even get that floss my mother told me to use. I suddenly wanted to be drunk and I wanted for the first time in my life to be part of the brotherhood of men.

We made our way to the door of the shack and pushed inside. No one had even noticed we were gone.

"What have YOU been doing?" someone said.

"Oh, nothing," I mumbled.

Jack laughed. "He just cleaned up on me," he said.

"Like hell I did," I said, laughing too, and we poked each other affectionately.

My gratitude changed to pride and I realized that I'd fought him, and it was over. I stamped around the room, pulled off my torn shirt and felt the muscles moving beneath my skin, imagined that all the beautiful women in the world were looking at them with wonder that I had this body, these teeth to run my tongue over, now and forever to feel this firmness beneath my feet, the newly discovered brotherhood and the stars.

I never thought much about that debt. I guess I'm paying it back, and it feels easy, and sort of irrelevant.

Brian Fawcett

Essay on Kafka

He didn't dream; he refused.
he had a different idea of work.
soon would he wake and dress--
neatly, it didn't matter--
polished shoes, a hat, a collar.
the air stung his throat.

Father was the butcher in the closet;
mother whispered and swooned.
they slept in the same coffin
calling to him till the starlings
shreiked at the window, glass
cold at his fingers' ends.

He quit sleeping. spectacles, black
trousers, white shirt. his body
was water in the open gutter.
he didn't mind, he walked slow,
listened to the children howl
far down the stone corridors.
he put off marrying, like a coat.

The city smelled of overripe meat.
he wasn't hungry. he ate
the unanimous fog. No food
is enough of the necessary food.

Remote distances constituted him.
people looking at him looked away.
his body, thin as light,
ceased trembling, and he began
to make the soul:

Words are the other sense.
The soul needs a progenitor;
it needed him; it was his need.
It picked him up bodily,
and flung him hard
at the great wall.

Jon Furberg

Sluggishly filtering through the filthy gauze drape, the sun crept across the bed. As it reached his eyes he awakened. He was late again. She had turned off the alarm. Rising quickly he padded barefoot to the bathroom. The wooden floorboards were cold and sandy. The bathroom door was missing, and in its place hung four strands of cheap plastic beads.

An unlined face greeted him from the cracked mirror above the brown-stained sink. Just a hint of dark circles appeared beneath his large, blue eyes. He ran the water to brush the taste of her from his mouth. Several pairs of damp pantyhose hung from the curtain rod above the short porcelain tub. A large clot of her hair had clogged the drain; he would not shower this morning. Hunger pulled at his stomach.

In the cramped kitchenette he jerked open the refrigerator door. He thought about breakfast but all he saw was a saucer of rancid margarine, one cracked egg, a half carton of milk and two quarts of beer. He took the milk and slammed the door shut.

Above an overturned bag of garbage the day was exposed in a small window. Through the smudged panes he saw the ocean. He felt the roll and the crash of the waves. It was misty outside, with an overcoat of heavy fog thickly settled along the shoreline. It was a moody grey winter morning.

He returned to the bedroom to find some clothing he could wear to school, but the limp pile at the foot of the bed had just grown larger. 'She never does the wash', he thought as the clock of things he had to do inside his head just kept ticking. As he dressed he looked down on the figure sprawled across the bed.

The morning sunlight had stripped her suggestion of girlish good looks and her face was the ten years tired he knew to be true. The mascara was smeared blackly across the pillow, her puffy and wrinkled eyes did not soften her hardened look. A stream of saliva oozed from her open mouth, down her chin, and onto the mattress.

It had been six months since he had agreed to share this studio with her. He could not afford to rent an apartment and go to school. She had promised not to interfere with his studies. She needed him. He had given her money from his scholarships to buy food, but she had bought wine instead. She had begun to complain that he ignored her for his books. He had felt guilty and had neglected them instead.

At night he had performed as expected. He derived no pleasure from her ritual. He rammed into her like a machine. Afterwards, when she fell into a snoring slumber, the room stank with her odour. As he watched she brought up a throatful of cough and turned over, revealing a dark, wet stain beneath her thighs. She smacked her lips and resumed an even, open mouthed, breathing.

He had been given notice that missing another morning class would cause him to be dropped. There was nothing to do now. This was the third time she had turned the alarm off. Each time she had claimed not to remember.

There was more than an hour before his first class, and several more before she would wake up to drink breakfast. He descended the wooden stairway, passed through the dirty alley, crossed the highway and walked out onto the sandy beach.

Stillness clung wetly to the morning. The fog absorbed most sounds, yet carried others. Moaning its deadly warning, a foghorn bobbed somewhere just offshore. The sound rose and fell like the heaving swells of the sea. A fish, leaping clear of the steel-grey cold water, noisily slapped down a few yards away. The sounds of the occasional

passing motorist on the coast highway were muffled entirely by the mist. He was truly alone here; she could not intrude.

As he walked aimlessly along the shore, the swirling vapour obscured his view landward. The cold Pacific lapped at his feet, turning them blue and hurting his ankles. He stopped to watch the short waves rise up, then crash quietly upon the dark sand. As he peered closely through the haze, he could just make out an exposed sand bar several yards offshore.

Occasionally sandbars appeared along this stretch of beach. The tides here contained a powerful undertow which created or destroyed sandbar in minutes. Sometimes the water was so shallow that you could walk out and stand on the tiny islands.

He squinted for a closer look. The sandbar appeared to be brighter than the surrounding sea, as if the sun were bathing it through a gap in the overcast sky.

She always clung to him whenever another woman was around. Few bothered to come anymore since she had begun to drink. Her disability checks would soon end, yet she did not have any plans for the future. There was no future with her. Not for him. He was stuck in negative infinity, repeating the same lines again and again, playing the same role.

He shivered a little as a small breeze pierced his t-shirt. The sandbar looked even closer now, as if he could reach out and touch it. The sea could play tricks on the eyes and sometimes on the mind. He enjoyed walking along the shoreline. Especially in the fog. It was a private place. He was alone with his mood and even thoughts seldom disturbed the isolation.

He made out a narrow pathway to the sandbar through the churning waves. He stepped forward. The icy water rose up his legs, at first shockingly cold, and then, as numbness. He must be rid of her, he thought. He must tell her and then move out. There would be a row, she would scream and cry. It was always so difficult. He walked on.

It seemed that the water became shallower after a few yards. Then darkness. He was confused. Had the cloud layer blotted out the feeble sunlight altogether for a moment? He continued to push forward. Now he could see quite clearly again. The sandbar was just ahead in a spot of shining sunlight. the sand looked dry and clean.

He felt calm walking onto the sandbar. He was more relaxed than he could ever remember being before; the sand was hot and fine beneath his feet and he wriggled his toes in it. The sky was bright blue with only a shadow obscuring the shoreline. He gazed upwards, then closed his eyes and let the sun lick his face. It felt good. He lay down on the warm sands and dreamt.

Five days later and three miles down the beach his body washed ashore clad only in jeans, a t-shirt and a haunting smile. In the pockets there was no identification, only a note: " The logical culmination of all those things which could possibly hurt me is suicide."

Willi Wisely.

For men

In your light, kind moon,
a man sheds his skin
like a snake
in 28 days,
and a woman her seed--
all becomes new and strange.

New bodies each month
(the dead, the disappeared,
and the born)--
what can we do. Nothing
worth a hand save to build
our houses where She
may ascend to fullness,
a woman walking naked
into a lit doorway,
though we see only her outline,
all we can bear.

Not to dream anymore of beauty,
lingering here in the dark,
but awake to her, her face
the real figure of speech--
of a mercy that belongs
to more than we have made,
belonging to another place
without which we merely die.

She stands now at the doorway
knowing us in our shadows,
offers her flood
of bloody children to men.
Peril to turn away
peril to strive against her
peril to try and hush the infant
howling from her belly for release!
The least gesture of her hand
has power to return us unprepared
to face the moon that carved
our bones and raised the sea
against mountains.

A woman seeking a place
of shelter for a birth--
and out again we'll come,
squalling, into the same earth,
the same cold rain.

Jon Furberg

Time is a pecker.

Kenny was given a cell. He was amazed at the cleanliness of the place, except for a small piece of meat on his desk. It looked very fresh. This was not included in the preconception he had had of prison--but he knew the hygiene was all a facade because of the filthy degradation he had witnessed all around him on his way in. He read it in the eyes and gestures of the other convicts. I guess, he thought, that must be the way that the authorities would like to portray the place. He shrugged, well it is just a place to do time. First step was to find some imaginative way to gauge it by.

Let me see, he thought. There is slow time, fast time, good time--nice weather, bad weather. The indians had a good way to gauge time. When things happened they would refer to that time as, for instance--the time the chief's horse died or the year of the big snow. I see, he thought, that they serve time here as a piece of meat. The significance of this overwhelmed him. What is a piece of meat but dead flesh. But there was a clock on the wall just by his head and it was inhibiting him from thinking clearly. It sounded like there was a woodpecker in that clock. With the constant pecking sound cracking at his head, he thought, I'm going to need some imagination. That pecking sound might be a woodpecker pecking away at my imagination. I'll have to go see what the other convicts do with their time. I've got to move quickly because if I find out that that woodpecker is really pecking away at my imagination, I'll have to find some way to free it before it goes to pieces altogether.

So Kenny went to check out what kinds of imagination he could find. He asked one guy lifting weights if the pecking sound in the clock could be a woodpecker pecking away at his imagination. The convict replied that it couldn't be because his imagination was too big to fit in that small a box. This was confirmed by several other convicts standing around who guffawed and said they had imaginations of great magnitude too.

But this did not satisfy Kenny because he was sure that the monotonous clicking had to have some kind of effect upon his power to fantasize.

So he went back to his cell to look at the time that lay before him. The piece of meat was getting green around the edges. This depressed him a bit so he went to see a neighbour about how he dealt with it. He visited a man in the next cell who had been studying time for the last seventeen years. He asked him what he should do.

"Well", the man said, "Me, I watch it and when it turns green around the edges like that, I slice the green parts off and toss them in that bucket over there--Like this! And he quickly sliced off the green edges. The meat was smaller but it was red again.

"Where does it go from there," Kenny asked.

"Oh, to the dump" was the only reply he received. Well, there ain't much to be learned here, he thought and he left.

Kenny was still sure that the clicking sound in the clock was being fed by his imagination. If it wasn't, then why was he feeling so bored and uninspired? Sometimes he felt like just tearing it off the wall and seeing what answers were inside. But he was afraid that if he did that he might break something and he wouldn't be able to put it back together again.

So one morning, before he woke up, he went for a stroll down the walkway where he met a guy he knew was just hanging around playing the duck. Previously they had had some weird conversation in which he had convinced the guy he was a nutbar.

"Hi," he said, "Nice to see you out this morning so early. See all the zombies. Let's have some fun with them. No. Don't go. Stay with us. Kenny was with a friend and they seemed to be joined at the wrists. He got afraid suddenly. "No way! Maybe it's best I just pretend I'm a zombie too and get away from these guys. Well at least he had got an answer to one thing: If you've got a friend who can make you believe that what you are doing is imaginative, then you've got some kind of imagination--Sadly it was not the kind he was looking for however. So he woke up and convinced himself that it was a dream and that a new piece of meat was waiting on his table to be worked on. Anyway, it wasn't going to take that long for this piece of meat to go green because the sun was out today, shining directly on it. He turned another thought over in his mind: If there was some kind of way to preserve the meat it might give the clock more time and possibly drive that woodpecker nuts, if it didn't drive him nuts first. But that remained to be seen. Kenny got out his pen and started to section the meat off. The constant pecking at the back of his head went on as usual and it kind of made him wonder about life. What was the life span of a woodpecker? It must be shorter than a man's. All he had to do was outlast that woodpecker and make sure he never let it escape so it could reproduce.

Kenny Cound.

SPIDER QUADROLOGY

Night
over the swamp
dark clouds scuttle
past the mountains
across
the ubiquitous face
of the silver moon.

A killdeer cries
"killdeer, killdeer, killdeer"
in the darkness beyond
Kleig lit fences.

Muted voices, words
drift across the compound
through barred windows
crimes, dreams, loves, are
relived, again and again.

No one cares or listens,
their stories are all the same
only the passing of hours
only the waiting is important.

The brown spider
in the corner of the window
waits for dawn.

Days pass
the spider grows
The window sill littered
with sucked out bodies

I don't understand
my fascination
with watching the spider
devour the trapped.

This spider
half the size of a fingernail
holds me too.

It feeds on kills
I make
ensnared on the web a supply
of flies, leather-jackets
and once, even a moth.

At night
the desk lamp shines
on the web
attracts night flyers.

I've better things to do
than spend my days
with a silent spider.

I used to write
letters of love
now, I write
only of the spider.

I grow tired
of the spider,
my distaste grows
with its body fat.

I no longer feed it-
Let it capture its own food.

Yesterday
it fought another spider
on the strands and won
The other spider, still alive,
is wrapped, secure,
in the window's corner
where other victims are stored.

The spider
accustomed to the smoke
I blow at it over the days
ignores me as a nuisance.

I light a match
spark and sulphur smell
touch the spider with the flame

It leaps from the web
drops, out of view
outside, along the wall
a silver thread.

I throw out the match
take up a pencil
snag the web and draw up
the spider.

It's hurt
curled in a ball
unmoving, so small
my act fills me
with regret and anger
an insect can affect me so.

It moves crawls
slowly up the strand
only its right side works
the left side singed, crippled
it reaches the corner
and curls up again.

Seven days

then the spider moves
uncurls, stretches
curls back into itself

I watch the developments
with anxious, eager eyes. I
start a letter, exuberant
am soon struck with awe
as I watch a secret unfold.

The metamorphosis begins

Thin brown legs extend
in a matter of an hour
stretch twice their length
the spider changes colour,
pale white almost transparent
the extended legs turn
the spider to a squid
old legs discarded
to join the window sill husks.

Two hours later
the metamorphosis complete
it ventures from the corner
crosses the window

Welcome Back, I say
to my companion.

Dancing In The Park

Three cheers now for the earth
indifferent to us!
To hell with the vanity of solutions!
Even if angels withhold speaking,
even that is a message--
some imperious godsend, recent news.

Saying this, either I have just leased
another fragment of life,
another bed for our wild pain--
or I wake up drunk and out of work,
spinning-out here a favorite solitude
in this domestic, little park
where angels fumble everything
cleaving to our innermost places.

The light in the trees disturbs.
Kids play in sight of the towers.
I can name them and what goes on.
I get to my knees as if what's in me
is a bow being drawn--
an old test of strength.

And I would release the invisible arrows
feel the string vibrate against
the wood.
But from among the houses gunshots
freeze the moment.
Who gets it now?
What disaster whose charm has faded
longs like a jilted lover?

I am tired of imagining paradise.
There,
there is the invisible beast--
a ring of towers dancing,
while the gunshots echo
through the trees and tabulations
light up offices.
I have been invisible too,
trying to match wits with it,
goaded by the comedy of my beginnings.

But the dance is never ours--
not even as punishment
or the belligerent calls for clarity
that might end the loneliness
in our arms.

Norm Sibus

The Redford Look

The hair stylist at Hollywood DuBue told me that the 'Robert Redford' hairpiece would change my life. He winked as I left and gave me a friendly word of advice:

"Try Honolulu if you're looking for romance, sweetie, the girlies there love the Robert Redford Look."

I took that advice and found my way to the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Honolulu. After two days of beach prowling, I was ready to give up on romance and go back home--the Robert Redford look had got me nowhere. The only girl that glanced at me twice was a hooker in a rickshaw who said I looked like a fairy she once knew.

The Redford look. Ha! I'd been conned, I told myself as I smashed back another rye. I had had more luck as a baldy picking up nurses at the Arlington Dance Hall in Vancouver. At least the Arlington wasn't hot and muggy like it was at this poolside lounge. I wished I was back at the Arlington right now, doing the tango with a nurse from Kelowna, instead of sitting here in paradise getting stoned on rye at six-fifty a shot.

I was on the twenty third verse of 'Ninety-Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall', when the blonde walked in. I took one look at her and my voice drowned in my throat. Her bikini wasn't a misdemeanor larger than pasties and she had that rush of long golden hair that I fall in love with everytime I see pictures of those California beach girls.

The waiter whisked over and said it was 'Happy Hour', which meant every second drink was on the house. I ordered a beer. The gears were clicking but with any more rye I'd be flooding the engine. I was going to make a play for the blonde.

She sat down two tables away, near the edge of the pool, and tugged at the strings to her bikini top. What beauty! For a moment I thought I was looking at a real Playboy bunny. I closed my eyes and dreamed of the two of us lying entwined together in the sand. Her bronzed body was wet with surrender, her oiled skin slid like soft clean clay under my hands. When I opened my eyes and started watching her, she never once looked my way. I got nervous that she would leave if I tried some cornball approach. I had to sober up.

I was so absorbed in her that I couldn't exactly recall how this dark green bottle came to be on my table. I remembered ordering a beer but not the waiter bringing it. The label had some foreign scribbling written on it but I could make out 'made by the Caliph of Baghdad'.

I guess I had drunk half the beer before I heard the voice. It was low and husky and seemed to be coming from way down inside the bottle.

"Do you want that chick over there?" it asked.

Ha! Someone is playing a game on me, I thought. I checked all around the lounge but there was nothing. Nobody was paying me any attention at all. The closest person was the blonde. She was watching a diver on the high board.

"Well," the voice came again, "Do you want her?"

Okay, I thought, I'll play along with the gag for awhile and see what happens.

"Who wouldn't," I replied, "Tell me what I have to do to get her."

"Come closer!", the voice called, "Put your ear against the lip of the bottle."

In for a penny, in for a pound, I thought, as I held the bottle up to my ear. At first all I could hear was the fizzle of beer bubbles popping, then the voice started to whisper:

"Have you got a thousand dollar bill?"

"Yes," I whispered back, "but it's a lot of money to pay for a little fun."

"Who says you have to lose it? All you're going to do is make an

investment."

"What do you mean?"

"Send her a note with a thousand dollar bill inside. Tell her that you love the way that she smiles and that you're willing to wager a thousand dollar bill that you can make her laugh. Say that if you win the bet, you get your money back and she gets to spend the night making love to you."

"But look how bored she is, sitting here in paradise," I replied, "She's been playing with that swizzle stick in her drink just to stay awake. What could I possibly do that would make her laugh."

"Do as I tell you," the voice crooned, "and you'll hear the whisper of panty-hose tonight."

"Ah, you're putting me on...whoever you are. Come on, show yourself. I'll buy you a drink and we'll have a good laugh together."

Nobody popped out of the bottle. The blonde ordered another cocktail while I stewed with impatience. A bubble slowly rose from the lip of the bottle and burst.

"Well, made up your mind yet?"

I couldn't believe it then and I still can't: the bottle was vibrating in my hand as it spoke.

"You sure can't play if you don't pay, Jack."

"Sure, sure, I realize that. I always pay my own way."

"Look Jack. Time is money and I'm not in the habit of wasting either. If I didn't know your personal circumstances and the length of time you've spent searching for that special lady, I wouldn't be here. That honey blonde over there is the one you've been looking for all of your life."

"Okay. Let's say you're right and I do get lucky, what's in it for you? Nobody plays Cupid for nothing."

"Still suspicious, eh? Well I guess that's the nature of your business. We'll talk about that tomorrow morning after you've had a quickie and breakfast in bed."

He had me. I sent the bill over in a note with the waiter and asked him to wait for a reply. It wasn't long in coming. She read the note and ran a long, lacquered fingernail along the edges of the bill. When she nodded, I was so excited I could hardly sit still.

"Ain't she just like a woman," the bottle interjected, "She just can't resist a man of mystery. You're halfway there. Now all that you have to do is follow my instructions."

I listened carefully to every detail and began following the plan by paying off the pool announcer to introduce me as the greatest acrobatic diver in the world. As the announcer went on, reeling off accounts of my many daredevil feats, I climbed up the tall ladder and walked out onto the end of the springboard.

The lounge grew quiet as I bounced lightly on the end of the board. Was all this really happening to me, the ex-Lothario of the Arlington and East End boy. I could barely swim and here I was on a diving board as high as a Douglas Fir, trying to be the circus clown.

I looked down at the blonde, so far below and caught a flash of white thigh as she crossed her gams. That did it! I sucked in a deep breath and sprung high in the air...just like those Acapulco divers on the TV...but I must have missed something important because everything went wrong..maybe I forgot to tuck in my chin...or what?

The next thing I knew I was falling through the air on my back. Whack! My body hit the water like a slab of prime chuck, and I sank in a rush of bubbles to the bottom of the pool.

That dive had to be funny I thought, as I pawed my way to the surface--it damned near killed me! The dive must have been funnier than even I had anticipated because as I broke the surface everybody in

the lounge was laughing uproariously. The blonde was laughing the hardest. I hollered over before she laughed herself into an accident.

"Hey Lady, You're mine. I'm the guy that made the bet with you."

She got up and walked over to the edge of the pool, and smiled at me with a big blue pair of half-purred eyes. Up close like that was the first time I noticed a few small flaws...like the protruding Adam's apple and the faint shadow of a beard. Her voice floated down onto me, low and husky, just like the bottle.

"So you have sweetie," she crooned, "why don't you retrieve your hairpiece from out there in the pool and come up to my suite. I've always had a yen for the Robert Redford look."

David Rourke

A look inside me.

If I gave you a look inside me
Would you love me
or laugh at what you saw?

Because I can't bear the thought
that someone could get close
enough to really hurt me.

My Mother taught me

My mother taught me much
To spread love all around
But I did not listen:
I am unloved and uncared for.

My mother taught me much
To help those in need
But I did not listen:
I am the one in need now.

My mother taught me much
To be attentive to my elders
But I did not listen:
I am not wise.

My mother taught me much
To be kind to all
But I did not listen:
I am neglected and uncaring.

My mother taught me much
To give to those who ask
But I did not listen:
I have lost all.

My mother taught me much
My companions are me
But I did not listen:
I am now in jail.

Cory Cardinal

About the Girlchild at Mt. Pleasant
Graveyard as the Eclipse passes

She sits in the high grass
near the road, gazing
into her lap as the weird
shadow advances over the lawn.
her skirt full of wild flowers
she is so taken by this mild wind
in her hair and the spelling light
along the cypresses bordering
the graveyard
that the world slips off
and she enters through a portal
upon the landscape of memory.

Here, in the odour of Spring--
bluebells, poppies, irises--
the car's rush and shovel's ring
on stone in a far off grave
merge and turn into a voice:
Father brings a story;
Mother comes to sing.

She knows she's seen them here
before, feels the moon lift
in the small of her spine,
knows that the amber cord of light
that loops through her womb
draws her into the great circle
of all things--where, with a cry,.
she beholds her children, and theirs,
dancing, dancing in the huge room.

Jon Furberg

Between Us

The kids play on the floor,
unappeased by the simple toys
provided by the V & C staff.
Their noise sometimes drowns out
the stereo blaring across the room.
Stevie Nicks sings of The HIGHWAYMAN

while we try to fill our time
with words & thoughts we can keep
with us until the next visit.

Two hours of intensity
twice a week. The longing,
the craving for each other's presence
to sustain the hopes.
Grasping--hands reach for the other's
contours, at the risk of cancelled
visits: (Close contact & passionate
kissing not permitted).

I feel the tenseness in you,
knowing there's little I can do.
I cannot change this room with its
red chairs with wide armrests:
armrests which press painfully
against us as we hug,
trying to overcome their small
additional barrier.

Most of our conversations have
been recitals of pain, individual
and shared.
The pain & sadness we called our child.
You said we almost wallow in our pain.
It is not suprising--pain can be a wall
to hide behind & it's familiar
something we can share between us.
Pain is real.

Fears,
our hopes are of the future,
free of these prisons,
fears of a violent death & loss of the
other,
wondering if we'll fit together later.
Fears, imagined or real, that can't be
erased
because only the future answers hope.

But the future isn't here
Reality, like the other day when Jason
ran home yelling Mom, Mom, someone at
Kent got stabbed.
& both of you waited near the radio,
dreading the name, praying it was
someone other than me.
We ignore these things by covering

them with dreams of freedom.

Freedom, an abstract term, usually applied to the idea that cement & bars cannot a prison make--cannot hold your spirit; an ideal that allows a prisoner to refuse to recognize that he is a prisoner.

But freedom has become bastardized, has become whatever we don't have & want. Each interpretation adds or subtracts until the simple has been complicated.

& we talk away the visits,
discussing the latest complications
missing that our freedom is immediate
within the Love & Care & Sharing we
have between us. The kids play on the
floor & Stevie Nicks sings
OUTSIDE THE RAIN
while armrests press against our ribs
and I yearn to hold your body.

Tommy Elton

Carnal Purity

Janice, sweet like death, Janice. My poor, viciously slandered lover. Not lover in the usual corrupted meaning, but lover in the sense of carnal purity.

I do so love you. The recollection of your petite frame, even in the silhouettte of a half remembered dream is absolutely refreshing. You were too perfect, too sensual, too naive in a way that surpassed intellectuality.

My beloved Janice, my mentor, my tormentor, how innocently you peck at my heart. But I am here alone now. Alone to weep over my chameleon whose color I am no longer sure of.

What is time? I, in my innermost being, my holy of holies, know that love, the fullfillment of the hermaphroditic quest, is timeless.

We met on the steps of a battered schoolhouse. It was a most stimulating experience. We were frank and uninhibited. We were totally honest. I told Janice about how my sister had warned me against her. Janice said that she had fantasized about seducing my sister. We shared infidelities. She knew my delinquency. It was love.

We shared. We laughed. We authenticated ourselves. Through peaks and valleys our conversation flowed. Through tears of compassion we moved to a unity of thought. We were drawn by our similarity into a breathing, living entity of two faces and one heart. Our souls had joined.

To avoid embarrassment I asked Janice to send her Labrador, who had nuzzled my privy part to arousal with his rude snout, home. We walked and waddled, our legs entangled. Inevitably we fell to the ground in a painful pleasant juxtaposition.

Our first meeting not only commemorated our souls meeting a conjuctive unity but we welded our souls together, yet somehow we permanently set the foundation for my eventual tragedy. We gloried in it, ignorant of the future. The roles of masculinity and femininity did not exist in our sexual world. We were two sensual creations soaring in our sensual freedom. A finger, a kneecap, a breath, all became sensual vessals. My ear lobe had an orgasm.

I was just thinking about how this work will be categorized upon completion.

F

Wo Poor Melancholy Child
 Worobets, Gregory, S.
 Nowhere, Nobody Pubs. Never,

It's not fair. I always wanted to be a scholar, although I never applied myself to it. I still feel I shouldn't be in the same shoebox as Zane Grey or some like minded drivell driver. My mother always felt I should write. I wonder why that was? Was it my intelligence? My eccentricity? Or perhaps it was because she could think of no other

way for anyone as lazy as I to make a decent living. No, it couldn't have been that or she would have driven me to politics.

As this is a very informal and unpretentious work, and since I am not limited to the rigid confines of traditional story telling, I trust you'll bear with me through my little digressions. If you find this difficult, then fuck off and read some Zane Gray.

This paragraph will be somewhat more reflective than the last. That is because I spent last night in serious contemplation and masturbation. I feel dreadfully alone without my love, and I fear I shall never love again if the cord which binds our souls together is not severed. I feel deprived, robbed of my happiness by our separation in body, yet I am still in bondage to the limbo I am held in. Condemn me or let me go.

I've often wondered who was responsible for authoring my fate. I would like to remove his privy member. I remember writing a poem about this rogue. I shrouded the poem with Greek mythology which is always appropriate, but, even with that adulteration, I was still able to express my rage sufficiently.

Aphrodite, Venus, Goddess of Love;
I care not what name you prefer,
She still fucked my life.
Always, always, she stands prepared;
Stands prepared to destroy me,
to melt every ice castle I construct.
All that shit that transpired at Troy.
All of it!
Was forged by her unfeeling hand;
Her and that bastard Ares.
What a dangerous pair they were.
Oh, if only Hephaestus, while
Entangling them in his net,
Had done us the favor of
welding them in an airtight coffin,
We should no longer be cursed with
the tricks
and infidelities of Aphrodite,
Nor the lesser evils of Ares.
But no such luck.
The gimp was incapable of
anything beyond shield making
And what not.
Well, I too am beaten
By the mighty daughter of Uranus.
But I will not be held speechless,
No...
Fuck You aphrodite!

And yet the culmination of my learning was my graduation onto the higher plane of sensuality. It is here that my growth is evidenced, it is here that my melancholia is fully justified. After a long absence I met Janice once again in our town. As she approached, my soul rejoiced and jumped out to meet her. I cried with joy and positioned myself to receive my true love. We embraced and for the first time since my departure I felt whole. Unity restored is a blessed thing and my soul was busy reintroducing itself to the further boundaries which had been so long been neglected. What elation! I was whole.

Yet I knew it was different. I no longer felt awed by her presence, but instead felt a need to aid her in her journey towards the higher plane of carnal purity and knowledge. When she said, "I don't know what it is but every time I'm near you, I melt."--I knew that the roles we had assumed at the beginning had been reversed. I was now a master--not necessarily sexually, but a master in the quest for sensual perfection. And that was the font of my melancholia. Janice was engaged to another. She would not sit at my feet and learn. She might melt and commit amorous acts but she would not continue the journey we had shared.

And so, I, with my new knowledge, find her the only person suitable to share the truth of carnal purity with. I am still locked to her by this necessity. And I love her. I would marry her. Janice is the only one. We must again travel the winding road of carnal truth, she and I, together as an hermaphroditic creature.

Oh God, could you but bring my dear Janice to read this!

My first year in prison has passed and I am unable to progress to the second without my love, who makes the seasons evolve. I cannot grow without the other half of my being. I am incomplete, stripped of my power. I need you Janice, and I plead, through tears, and on my knees, I plead with you to return to me for our eternal progress. I ask you either to return to me, or forever condemn me to an existence as a poor melancholy child.

In Desperation, Gregory.

Gregory Worobets

0000-0000-0000-0000

[illegible]

nip my shoulder
Her fingers
curl my hardness
guide me
past the petals
deeply into her
heat

Her legs
bend upward
lock behind me
Her arms
squeeze me tight
as we move
in rhythm
grind our love
together.

Tommy Elton

Beginning The Spring

One Sunday night near the end of my sabbatical year in the Gulf Islands, I got the phone call from Claudio, the union treasurer. An important vote: a vote to call a strike vote. "I think you should be here. You're needed, buddy."

We were bored, Ben, Jessica, me. We sat around the fire, drinking and talking about our future plans, our future lives. All of us discontented, bored with our boredom even, on the beautiful island, smoking late, watching the fire burn out, adding here a brick there a wall to these fantasy future lives, and listening to Joan Baez. Ben left very late, and we went to bed too tired even for basic sex. So the alarm went off for me to catch the early ferry--the only ferry--it was though I hadn't even slept, as though the record was still playing, and that's the point. The music lasts longest, like a magnet that has put certain lines of force into you, and in the morning you still have them. So I lift the body, not even enough sleep to get hung-over, and thinking if I don't get on the road by 6.15--and it'll be icy too--then that's it, because they don't wait on that early run, and I find, automatically, I'm singing! Still hearing that music.

In Ben's truck (dah; dah; DAH; dah-di-da-dah) trying to fit the key into the ignition (that poo-oor gir-rl / tossed by the tides of MIS-fortune) and finally getting it in, (in the quiet morning, la dah-dah-DAH etc.) and it turns...nothing!

The whole build up for nothing. Dead battery, whatever, I sure ain't gonna make that ferry, as my friend Louis would put it. (Janis Joplin gone...the romance of it, the music winding down to the funeral in my head.) You understand about people getting out of stalled cars on freeways, and kicking their wheels. Damn it, I won't even see Louis! Might as well go back to bed and build up the hangover with a second round.

Ha! A whine, a drone, a CAR! Shit, somebody else from the Point going to catch the 6.40. But where is it coming from? In this quiet, you learn like a dog to recognize the sounds of individual cars, and I don't recognize this one. And if it's not up on the road, where is it?

Aphrodite rising from the ocean, anadyomene--a surprise of that order. Off my beach (how long has it been there, what did they steal?), an orange raft on the roof, comes this Land Rover with three people in it, and drives across my astounded gaze, over the field, up to the driveway, and behind the trees. The day is saved, hooray.

Wait. I forgot to stop them.

I plunge upwards over the seeded fall, drowning my city shoes in mud, and get to the road before they pass, and wave, and they stop.

They are terrible people. I can hardly bear them, except that they are giving me the ride. I've been driven along this narrow road by drunks in unsafe cars, and once by an old man without a driver's licence whose conviction of emergency carried him over the corners, and I have not felt as bad as this. What's the matter with them? Do they resent having to help me when they themselves are strangers here (doing what, exactly, government crest on the door?) and having whiskey breath over them, and my chatter? I hate them. Maybe they haven't woken up yet. Or is it a triangle? There are two men, one about forty, one about twenty five, and a young woman of indeterminate age. Why are they emanating guilt at six fifteen on a bright morning in the islands? Where did they sleep?

"Come over last night?"

"mmnyerr."

"From Victoria? Hey! You're not going to Vancouver are you?"

"mmnnarr rrrnnggyaaarr rrrictorrrrierrr."

"Uh huh. Oh hey! You must be the survey team come out to look at Tumbo for a provincial park?" (Who told me this last night, Ben, Jessica, or did I dream it in that short time?)

Silence. Ditto. Ditto.

They don't want to answer. Fuck em. They come over here on my tax money, sleep on my beach, drive across my field (well, rented) and make decisions about my environment, and they don't even have the manners to talk to me. gggo bagg to rrrictorrrrierrrr where you belong, assholes!

On the little ferry, I get right away from them, and drink my tea without bothering to take note of what they're doing, whether dribbling words to one another, or slimey snake looks, snickering with their disgusting lips that I'm still drunk from the night before. Fuck em. Unimportant human trash, what we have to put up with, what governs our lives. Unimaginative, unemotional, unmannered. Civil serpents.

Easy now. Why all this hostility (in the quiet morning)? Janis Joplin's been dead quite a while, and in any case, you don't even like her singing--gave Pearl away because you couldn't stand her ego twisting other people's songs. Alright, easy then, sip sip.

But it continues with me. Was it the whiskey breath, or was it because of who had been sleeping with whom on which seat of the Land Rover, or maybe a nylon pup tent that flounced and beat in the night? Or, for God's sake, did one of them get left behind on my beach while the other two rode out in the Sport-Yak 11 to Tumbo after supper, to fumble one another on the freezing oyster rocks, getting out and...well, and so on. I glanced over in contempt at the ugly bitch. To see what she looks like anyway.

Standing on the car deck, looking at them all sitting there in their warm little selfish seats, smugly waiting to drive off. Bastards! Listen, when I sit where you're now sitting, and I see some person obviously wandering about between the lanes while the boat docks, I open my door on the passenger side and lean out and yell, Hey! You wanna ride? and give it to them, perhaps going a few miles out of my way if necessary.

Oh I hate them. I will not stoop to ask a single one of them for a ride. I will not even go up to the pickup and say, Hey, man, do you mind if I ride in the back to the freeway, or wherever you're going?

I walk a mile and a half down the causeway. I remember the last time I walked it, at eleven o'clock one night after coming off the late ferry, and my car was in the parking lot, but I'd left the fucking lights on for five days, and the BC Ferries truck was away for servicing, and the guy said, "Ask the Highways Patrol guy," and I did, and he looked at his watch and drawled slowly, "We-ell, I guess I just went off duty," and, so help me, smiled, and started his truck and drove away. So, after walking the mile and a half now, I broke down and put out my thumb.

Big heavy Oldsmobile, about '57, cautiously kept, not a sign of rust, not a spot on the seats, and I get in and say, "Very kind of you, are you heading for Vancouver by any chance?" and he says, "Ja."

He talks. I tell him I'm coming in to a union meeting. For fifteen minutes he delivers a poisonous, whinging tirade on workers and wage settlements (making a mockery of democracy and killing the little man, putting him out of business) and I say yeah well, and he gets emotional and the sun is coming good and warm through the windshield and he...I guess you say, starts to cry. Not a muscle, not a flicker, not even a sniff, just these old cloudy tears sliding down in the furrows beside his nose and making a dry plop on his pants, punctuated by I hef bin union member, I hef been union member, pfut pfut, and the tears make

wet patches in the dry material till he's starting to look like a pissed rubby.

"Well God dammit I'm sorry if you're being squeezed out of your living, man, but I gotta fight for my rights, that's all." And he shut up.

And silence. The old car yaws and pitches ever so slightly on shocks that are beginning to lose it. The morning is fresh and bright. The tea and toast in my belly are turning to acid.

"You know,"...and he starts about the war, broken families, dead children, a building gone just like that (hand cuts the air so fast I can hear it), then: "I was fighting, you know, I was...member of a certain army...and we were parachuting into zis country, a certain country, five of us dere were, und zey shot us, you know, from de ground, Russian soldiers with rifles, you know, from de ground."

"They hit you?"

"Four dead. Me only is living."

"God."

I stare at the bullrushes at the side of the freeway, the frost on the brown cat tails, thinking: What does he do, drive out to Tsawwassen every time the urge comes on him? And pick up hitchhikers, and tells them the story (or holds a wedding guest with glittering eye), and then goes on and changes pants, and wanders down to some little store in Ladner or Steveston, where the union devils are putting the squeeze on him, and sits, remembering?

By now it's eleven o'clock. I'm at 25th and Cambie, where the lawns are all tidy, and the houses on one side of the boulevard are even larger than on the other. A huge black Ford pulls up. The ashtray is overflowing with butts, and as we pull away empty beer bottles roll against each other on the floor at the back. A young, big guy with a bad face. He stinks. I stink, and I can smell him. I listen to the cowboy on the radio, singing: "Well I start out the evening being selective / Take what I can get by two. / I never went to bed with an ugly woman / But I sure woke up with a few." His driving is a series of lurchings and brake stabs. I noticed the front and back ends had bits hanging off them, from the way he parks.

"Well how ya doing?" I yell above the radio.

"Bad."

"How's that?"

"Why does a person always lose their friends?"

He says he's been driving around since it happened, trying to figure it out. He says it ain't the first time either. Broke a bottle and shoved it into his best buddy's face.

"Beer bottle?"

"Yeah."

"Christ, you cut him?"

"Look here. Blood all over the place." He holds his arm up. Three dried lines of blood curve down from the wrist to the elbow.

"Well, Jesus, is he alright?"

"I dunno. I left when they called the cops."

And has been driving around since, trying to figure it out. Why does a person always lose their friends? I tell him it's the bottles that cause it. Yeah, but why does he do the bottle thing to them? It's always the same, then? "Sure. The last one, Rick, he had to have forty-three stitches in his face, and he can't breathe proper."

It's not the thought that if I took long enough, and drove around all day with him in this hot car, I'd get to the bottom of it with him. That doesn't interest me. It's to think of this guy every so often doing this. And others. Just driving around the city streets, trying

to figure stuff like this out. He lets me off, shakes his head, says sure, shakes his head, he's gone.

On the bus, two old women behind me converse. One speaks volumes, the other has a telegraphic style. Each volume begins at a point, and goes through forty-nine different themes before returning to the point, and then there's a pause. Then comes the telegram. Then the beginning of volume two. They seem to belong in a retirement home, but that can't quite be it. Now they're talking about the cost of food.

"...and you know the other day I slipped into Woodward's just quickly you know because if you don't get that 3.15 it's impossible and he won't tell them to move back, or he tries, but his voice is so weak and anyway half the time they're liquored up and he's so young, and I slipped in for a couple of nice pork chops, well first you can't find them they cut them so thin nowadays fast fry they call it because of all these young people living in apartments, which is a shame really I feel so sorry for the young things trying to make a go of it today and the cost of houses being all out of proportion, and some green peppers, and maybe a bit of bread because I wasn't sure the old loaf was still good you know I buy that Bio bread with the nice texture because you need that, you know the roughage, and of course but they don't put preservatives in any more and so naturally it goes off, or at least I think it does, and maybe yes I think it was a quart or maybe it was two quarts of the two percent though honestly I don't see what harm it does to drink the homo but then who wants to argue with the doctor when you're in their hands, and of course you have to wait in line so long now, and I knew there wasn't a chance in the world, I'd have to wait for the 3.30, and it was seven dollars, seven dollars, I just couldn't believe it!" Silence.

Then the other says: "I never shop at Woodward's."

"Well of course a person has their own individual likes and dislikes, I never go into that awful butchers anymore not since they got horse meat in the front case..." (etcetera) ending, "Why not?"

And the other, finally dragged out by the silence says, "I just don't."

"What's your reason?"

Suddenly it's become exciting. Confrontation politics, short and unavoidable.

"No reason."

So she launches again into freedom of choice, but finally her mind is too good to let the matter go fuzzy, she can't help it, the truth's the truth: "A person has a reason, there's always a reason, a person has to have a reason for what they do! Don't they?"

There is a long hostile silence. Then the telegraph voice gathers strength and courage from the remote provinces, I can feel it behind me like electric potential (even as the other voice repeats like dah; dah; DAH; dah-di-da-DAH, the dying chorus of a song: "A person has to have a reason!") and she says, "But they don't have to tell it."

They don't have to tell it!

I can hear breathing. The dry, bitter flames lick the air, curling against one another, blue flame against the red flame, and silence. A change has taken place in the balance. This thing that has occurred is going to take a long, long time to settle down. It will have to be paid for, and not once either. I turn to look at them, my head between their two faces.

But when I get off to change buses it does not come away with me. The thing is so polarized, so magnetic, it sticks fast in the bus and is carried East on Hastings, into Burnaby. I forget it quickly, like smashed glass, swept and gone.

In the late morning of the clear, bright, warming Spring day, the tannic acid has mollified. I'm hungry for soft meat, potatoes and gravy, a nice easy beer. A good lunch before the meeting. I get on the last bus, for the last short leg, and it's almost empty. Five or six people, and the fresh air coming in the windows. The driver is youthful, and whistling. opposite me, a man smiles, and my response is instantaneous:

"God, that is beautiful! What is that, gold?"

He has it on a gold chain round his neck, and yes, it's gold, an Olympic gold coin, a hundred dollar gold piece. He has given up driving, and is turning his gasoline savings into gold. This is the first hundred. It shines, oh how it shines in the brilliant Spring day. His clothes are matched and tasteful, he wears them with satisfaction. He's young, but his hair is thinning. He has a vulnerable smile, like who has suffered, but his manners seem so gentle. I like a gay man. I invariably find them witty, full of good sense and charming manners. I finger his coin delicately, and compliment him on it more cautiously now than my "God, that's beautiful!" (duh.) He makes me feel country. We talk about the body's need for exercise. I tell him about the man who gave me a ride in from Tsawwassen, shot at as he dangled in the air. A German. Or maybe Hungarian. Couldn't really tell which side he fought on.

"Hungarian," he tells me, he knows them well.

"How's that?"

"If you ever played soccer against Hungarians, you'd know. They're mean and sneaky. They sneak all the time to the referee, but when they cheat or foul, oh no, that's a different story!"

This is the worst shock of the day. I stare into the man's face. Everybody on the bus has heard. Everybody is watching.

"But...mergg nyerrm nyerrm maybe people of different cultural backgrounds have different ways, mnyerrm mnyerrm, sort of, you know what one culture looks down on another culture just takes for granted normal."

"Normal! Huh! They shouldn't let them play soccer. They should heave them all out of the league. I hate Hungarians!"

I am speechless. When does this short ride end?

"But the worst, the VERY WORST, are the ITALIAN PLAYERS! I would almost rather not play soccer at all than have to play with the Italians. UGH!"

I whirl my head. Everybody is watching me. And then the bus stops, and everybody gets off, and I have not been able to act. Somebody needs to shoot somebody. Ground glass in the wounds. We need to wrap our enemies in parachute silk, and bury. God but the world is strange today. To get up in another world, with melodic dirge lines magnetizing your brain still "in the quiet morning," and ride, and ride in ("in on a sea of disaster, rode out on a mainline trail")....

At the union meeting attendance is high and the mood is grim. We have never been on strike before, and people are scared. We have not saved. We are academics, with no experience in these matters. Some of us have experience, or at least clear instincts, but others are confused. The union is divided. "Let's be reasonable," says one of the scientists. "All I want to know," one member calls out clearly, "is are we going on strike or not." The strategists stare at him wearily.

For three hours I listen to this motion and that counter-motion. Money is not the issue. Benefits are not the issue. Is there a strikeable issue or isn't there? It's the part-timers. They must get access to the same salary scale as everybody else. They must not be

treated as second class citizens. Most of them are women. Everything else can go. On this we stick. Why not let this one go too, somebody suggests. Why not poll the members and find out?

And it changes. The tone of the language suddenly hardens. The middle ground has gone.

A wave of anger puts me on my feet. "Listen here," I say. My foot goes up on the chair to keep me steady. I feel a surge of anger forcing up inside me, and I don't want to get out of control. "Listen here, that's crap!" I say. "That's a pile of horse shit, and you all know it. This union's united and that's all there is to say. Management tells the negotiating team to go poll the membership, and we all sit here arguing whether it should be a show of hands or a secret ballot or a mail ballot. It's the same divisive tactic they've been pulling for the last hundred years." I lose my temper and begin shouting, out of control. "Everytime you've come back to us, we've given you a unanimous mandate to go back in there and stand firm. So if anybody in this room does not agree, LET THEM SPEAK UP NOW! If anyone is feeling disaffected, LET THEM COME FORWARD NOW!"

Somebody starts clapping, but my temper is running on, and I'm shouting and making a total fool of myself, and half my friends are cracking up with laughter, as the words roll on and on from my mouth and my gut, and I can't stop them. The strike vote passes by over eighty percent. I feel stupid and spent. I feel terrific.

Around ten o'clock, I walk through the dark hole off the heavy avenue, my hands out like a blind man, bumping into cool green shoots. Under the heavy trees you can smell the moist greenery. I tap one, two on Zoe's window. Alone, she stands in the doorway with a smile. It's incredible how I can live through months with that face just a fading splotch in the back of my mind, not even a face. Then, there it is, oh warm and necessary. "How come you're in town?" she says.

"Oh, I came to see you, really."

"How long you staying?"

"I have to go back on the early boat." (In the quiet morning—already, the echo dead.)

"That's too bad."

After the white wine and the candle light and the alternating monologues, after the love making on her satiny bed, after each of us has cried a little for ourselves, and stroked the other, Zoe says again: "How come you're in town?"

And I say, "Well, it's Spring you know."

Bill Schermbrucker

Canadian Essence

The Canadian essence
is what?

V formations of canadian literary geese
searching out all the well worn sites,
constantly flying back on
latitudinal migrations
their cacophony of wronks
gracing the formidable subdivisions
and hobby farms along their well
greened trek, with suitable
unintelligible sound.

Do animals define that
essence best?

The whale, beaver or thunderbird,
gopher oracle, wild duck vision,
prairie crow, arctic rabbit,
innuit 'canadian' walrus spirit,
in which metropolis,
university,
zoo,
does this mythological wild essence,
incapable of critique,
exist.

Or the marshalled phalanx
of well burnished antique greek
gods and demi-deities
whose tired soap stories,
so the geese say,
define the essential plots of Western Civilization.
How Greek are the canadians?
how many dragon's teeth ancestors
jump well loined and articulate
to joust on the phone lines to the Canada Council?

and the feisty geese
plump on the leftover
wintergrain of farmer's combines
span the geographic miles.
Is there a link between
the politics,
the poetry,
East, West,
breadbasket, industrial heartland
consumer catchwords,
the poet's grist
the spirit of 'Canada',
the intellectual's grail.

Midst,
ice, unruned stones,
old water,
the laurentian shield,

eyebrows craggy
with folk wisdom
hoary totems
that soar above their humus;
the provincial planter pots
of literary magazines.

Flying above the nursery
in such well-ordered fashion,
along their protected airways,
flying in essence
eating essence,
finally,
with conscious aplomb
being that which they search for.

John Abbott

Looking for the Passing Lane

Mike walked into the short driveway. The house looked like a matchbox, except that it was a blanched white. The paint was faded and peeling, but the number was right: 714. The wooden stairs creaked even though he tried to take them silently. He knocked on the front door and waited.

A narrow face wreathed by long faun hair showed behind the screen.

'Oh Hi,' she said.

'Yeh, Mike, you know, I phoned.'

He put one shoulder of his leather jacket forward and smiled at her.

'Sure...' She made the connection and a small smile of her own ran across her tight chin. This Mike knows my ex-old man. He has an ounce to show me.

'I'm Susan.' She put out her hand formally. Jeez, I already told him my name on the phone. This is silly she quickly thought.

Mike liked that. Politeness always impressed him in meetings with strangers. For some reason he thought of ice cubes clicking in a glass-- if they had to bump they could do it with style. Anyway he knew his leather coat and tight sweatshirt looked good on him.

They shook hands. Susan took the opportunity to glance up and down the street, but there was no one sitting in any of the parked cars, no cars moving slowly down the sunny street.

A baby started crying behind her and her shoulder reflexively dipped toward the sound. Mike watched her with a growing sense of confidence. Her breasts, as she turned quickly in front of him, still had a supple curve. Some quality of the light and air in the little house suggested to him that she lived alone with her child.

'That's just Christine.' Susan looked back at Mike standing in the doorway and waved him in with a soft gesture of her hand.

'I put her near the window for the vitamin D in the sunshine, and sometime she cries.'

Mike smiled at that as he glanced around the shadows in the rooms as he walked past them. A couple of bar glasses and an ashtray overflowing with different filters leaned against each other on a low coffee table. There was a little red wine remaining in the bottom of both glasses. A curious refraction of the sunshine made the wine look like it was alive and turning in on itself. It reminded Mike of the heart-in-crystal of the evil wizard he had seen in a Sinbad movie. He enjoyed it when he could make connections between everyday life and events he had seen in movies.

Susan hustled back into the living room.

'Would you like some juice?'

'What kind have you got?'

'Well, I haven't been shopping but there's some grape in the fridge. And I've got ice too.'

Susan wasn't very happy with the circumstances in her kitchen. She hadn't bought anything substantial for awhile and gradually they had eaten their way through the cheezwhiz, the crackers and the little tins of Gerber apple sauce her sister had bought for Christine. But she smiled again at Mike because he might be the key to her money troubles if things worked out. She ran the scale of what could happen. At the

high end she would make enough money out of this to afford a car. Her sister's husband was a mechanic and he had an Oldsmobile 98 that he would sell her for \$800--but it had to be cash. Her hand stalled at the fridge door as she pondered again the rubber band over the broken catch and how much she really liked big cars. And at the low end she might get high.

When the fridge door finally double clicked open she was glad to see the bottle of grape juice was almost full. There was some ice and soon enough Mike had a glass of Welch's in his hand.

'Thanks, I had to drive around the streets here for awhile before I found your place.'

'I know. If it wasn't for the different numbers everything looks the same. People have said that before. Sharon's old man ran out of gas cruising around and around the block looking for the house.'

Mike wondered if Pat had moved the car closer to the house or if he was still parked at the end of the block. As he sat down he put his left hand into his jacket pocket and felt the smooth cylinder of his revolver. She'd probably get really nervous if she could see it. He felt a little embarrassed bringing a gun into her house but then again he hardly even knew her. He took a long drink and let the ice cubes click against his teeth.

'It's a sign of the times,' he said absently and looked across at her as if expecting a response.

'Oh sure,' Susan brushed some cigarette ash off the kitchen table.

'I'll call if it is alright with you?'

She looked up into Mike's brown eyes. He was alert, he wasn't high. So he's probably serious.

'He'll be in.' She announced.

At the mention of business Mike got up and glanced around. He suddenly remembered he hadn't checked to see if they were alone. Microphones, ears at the keyhole, he shivered and walked towards the doorway where he thought her kid would be.

'How many rooms do you have?' Mike waved his arm at a pair of closed doors. The sun flashed off Susan's glasses as she stepped past Mike and opened them both up.

'This is Christine's room, and this is the spare.'

Christine was a lump under her blue blanket. A couple of dolls were scattered under her crib. Their white limbs glistened in contrast to the surrounding muted and somber colours. Mike was standing in front of the narrow space between the two doors. When he looked to the right he saw Christine and the dolls; when he looked left he saw a pile of jumbled boxes and a heap of army blankets.

'Yeh, make the call.' he said decisively.

Susan turned and walked energetically into the living room. Mike gazed at the blankets and wondered how there had got to be so many burn holes through the fabric. It was curious. He stepped down the hall to the last room and edged the door open with his foot. He was half expecting someone to be crouched there, but of course there wasn't. It was the bathroom. There was a shapely blue elephant standing with his trunk up on the toilet lid.

For a moment Mike listened carefully for Susan's voice on the phone. He couldn't hear anything so he quickly flushed the toilet and walked back out into the living room. Susan was beside the phone scribbling on a notebook. She looked up in a start and brushed a strand of her hair from across her glasses.

'He'll be here in an hour. He's got something to do first but he wants it.'

Mike went over and sat down beside her. What if I crack the bag and get her high. He tried to imagine her expression as she came in her pants. He glanced across at her. She had a high forehead and a long thin nose. She looked like a librarian or a schoolteacher, he thought. He looked back for her breasts but her shirt was loose and wrinkled and he couldn't find them this time. The stirrings of passion subsided a notch. Mike remonstrated himself: I have to keep this businesslike, besides I know her old man.

'Where's Raymond?', Mike asked.

'Oh, at Sierra. He's working in the kitchen.'

'When's he getting out?'

'In October, but first he wants to go to camp.' Susan warmed to the topic.

'He wrote and asked about Christine. He's written about you too. And your friend. He says you were the best pals he had there.'

Mike grimaced slightly. The springs of the sofa were blown and as he shifted his weight he suddenly slipped up against her thigh. It was very warm. Mike quickly recoiled and leaned back away from her. Reflexively he looked over at his watch, then checked himself because he thought she might be offended by that. Momentarily Mike was confused in the wake of discordant emotions he was feeling.

'Ray says you've got the real thing.'

Susan was starting to let the excitement spread through her rather than trying to suppress it. She wanted to keep a detachment. Not let him see that she wanted. But she could almost smell it on him. And thinking of the smell was like getting on the rocket sled, was like the rush and tremors as she got off. Her eyes misted over as she thought about it. Her fit was in the toilet float. But Mike wouldn't know she fixed--Raymond had said that Mike didn't use. She idly wondered why anyone would snort it when they could fix. What a waste!

'There hasn't been any around. It's dry.'

Mike was staring absently at the artwork on her wall. The background was a furry black velvet. A dark little kid with huge doleful eyes had been painted in luminous colours on it. Mike wondered if it would glow in the dark. An hour wouldn't be too long to wait for a buyer but Pat wasn't going to be very happy sitting out in the car for much longer than that.

Pat had laid face deep in the jungle mud for days, so he had said. So Mike felt that Pat knew how to wait, but when it had been Mike's turn to sit he knew he didn't like the nervous sweat, the heat, his skin locked in a wet sticky kiss with the plastic upholstery of the car. It was cool inside Susan's house, even though he couldn't hear an air-conditioner. Mike relished the reversal of roles. Susan fussed a recalcitrant lock from in front of her eyes.

'You know I've got to see the dentist. I had an appointment but I missed it. There was no bus and Christine needs a sitter.'

Susan glanced foxily at Mike. She couldn't tell right now if he was interested in her or not. They were alone. His complexion was good. He looked healthy. She smiled but didn't show her teeth. Now she had mentioned it she was acutely embarrassed about how ground down the tops of her lower teeth were. Susan swept up a cigarette butt with her fingers and deposited it into the crowded ashtray. Mike was still looking distant.

'He knows everyone. He'll be able to get rid of it right away, if it's good.'

Susan felt she was trying to fill in the gaps between them with strings of words.

' I've dealt with him for a long time. Maybe Ray has told you about him. They're both friends of Red's.'

Mike suddenly heard her. Someone had told him that Red was a chemist. Was he in or out? Mike looked at Susan's expectant face. Something about automatic weapons and a lab. Mike wished his memory was better. Red was probably in, otherwise it wouldn't be dry. That was what he called a brilliant deduction. Mike noticed she hadn't mentioned his name, this mystery man who was supposed to show up shortly with the money.

' You know that we had a falling out with Raymond. A parting of the ways.'

She didn't respond and her expression didn't change.

' We thought that we could depend upon him but he let us down. We forgave him a couple of times when his money wasn't right and his excuses were definitely wrong, but finally it come out that he ain't got no heart either. We don't pack around any dead weight.'

Mike cast what he thought was a severe expression to his features, but he still feared that his rendition of that speech sounded unnatural in his own voice.

But he didn't have to worry with Susan. She was happy that they had found some common ground.

' I know what you mean,' she added eagerly, 'See why he ain't my old man anymore. He says he'll do things, he makes all kinds of promises but then he doesn't come through. He doesn't even help with Christine.'

She gazed down at the soiled carpet.

Mike thought about Raymond. What a deadbeat! Mike could remember vividly the incident in which Raymond had let a mexican beat him out of a balloon of dope. Raymond had given it to the greaser to look at, then the vato had just run off. The worst part was that Raymond had asked Mike to go get it back. And what else, oh yeah, Raymond had said his old lady Susan had been a virgin when he met her, a church going girl. Mike casually looked over at her and tried to see if there were any clues to that start left in her face. Susan was still talking.

' And some of Ray's friends came over and pulled the motor out of his truck when they heard he was in jail. They said it was there's.'

Mike nodded sympathetically and thought to himself, if she was my old lady that would never have happened. He stretched his wrist out carefully and peered at his watch. It was a new Seiko and he still wasn't sure which flashing numbers to look at. Susan's attention was drawn magnetically by his gesture.

' Would you like some more juice?'

' No thanks, I've got to use your washroom.'

As Mike pissed he wrapt his right hand around the full weighed ounce in his coat pocket. His thumb slipped smoothly along its firm length. After he zipped up, he pulled it out and peeled back the zip-lock plastic. A heady chemical smell instantly spread throughout the small room. Mike was impressed by the power that was locked into the fresh crystal. He quickly wrapped it up and palmed the full bag back into his pocket. He patted it and it felt substantial. He came out smiling that wide grin of confidence. The entire situation was under control. He held the bag and in it was the promise of the future. The chemical worked like magic, which it was. There would be a whole series of Susan's, prettier ones too.

When Mike had sat back down Susan coyly asked, ' Can I see it?'

She sounded no more professional than she felt.

Mike considered her tentative question. For some irrational reason he wanted to keep it hidden until the moment of exchange, but

then they would want to try some anyway. He could see that she was excited. Instead of nodding or answering, Mike suddenly pulled out the ounce and let it turn in his hands like a landed trout. With the sheen of the crystals a flush blossomed in Susan's face. She opened a drawer and brought out a small table mirror and a plastic ring of kitchen measuring spoons. Her movements were now steady and matter-of-fact. She put out her hand. Mike turned on the couch and looked out of the front windows. The sunshine was steady and quiet. Dry whisps of sweet pea rustled summerlong in the slightest of breezes. But no one was watching them. He edged the bag out onto the coffee table. Susan pulled it in with the aura of a priestess and unpeeled the plastic.

She was delighted, 'Oh it's fresh. You've really got it direct. I know he'll want this.'

The best part was left unsaid. Her connection would let her deal the half of it. Her cut would be the step she could put on it because it was fresh. Susan had not had this kind of opportunity for nearly a year.

She measured out an estimated gram and scraped it on to a matchbox size square of tinfoil. Mike watched her industriousness with a calm detachment. A frictionless wheel had been set in motion. He had given it a push and now the spokes just kept turning. She wrapped it up, corner by corner and let the square of foil sit like an offering beside the crowded ashtray. She hoped to fix when the man arrived; she would be the taster.

It had got darker suddenly. Mike looked around, vaguely apprehensive then he realized that the clouds were blocking out the sun.

'Your friend should be here by now.'

'He'll be here soon. We'll hear his truck. He likes to drive around the neighborhood first. Sort of look around.'

Mike was staring at his watch now. 'That's the hour!' Pat and Mike had told Chad the crank cook that they could off this ounce by five. If this pass was a dud they wanted to be on the road. Pat used to say, I'll only wait twenty minutes for God, let alone any other son of a bitch. This wasn't going to look good--it would be easier for Chad to find another out than it would be for them to find another Chad. Mike masked his anxiousness by yawning.

Suddenly their quiet was interrupted by the deep throated rumbling of a big engine. It passed slowly by. Mike couldn't tell if it was a bike or a truck. Almost on cue Susan jumped up and walked to the door. The noise stopped and there was a rustle of gravel somewhere in front. Mike heard some boots on the front porch stairs. He reached over quickly and jammed the bag back into his coat. He leaned against the armrest of the sofa and turned slightly so he was facing the door. His left hand settled on the butt of his revolver.

'Oh hi Rick.'

Mike saw the beard and the black leathers first, motorcycle boots and leggings. The guy Susan called Rick slid sideways past her into the living room. He nodded curtly at Mike, then turned back to Susan.

'I was over at Diane's.' Rick had a lush sloppy smile. 'I told her what you told me to say but she wouldn't even let me onto the porch. You know, that dobie she bought.' He paused and held his head low, 'I don't think she wants me back.'

As Rick was talking he drew up a chair from the kitchen and hunkered down backwards on it. Mike watched him carefully but Rick didn't seem to notice Mike at all.

'I can't find my keys either. Thought I just spaced out this morning from all that partying but I still can't find them. Had to use

a screwdriver to start my bike. I'm lucky I didn't lose it too.' Rick's pink lips shook in a smile.

Mike noticed that Rick's beard was patchy and uneven. Mike took his left hand out of his pocket and let it lay cautiously in his lap. He watched Rick like a guard dog.

Susan gestured towards him. 'This is Mike.'

Mike stood up and offered his right hand. They fumbled on the handshake as Mike kept his straight and Rick tried to grapple his thumb brother's style. Mike sat back down quietly.

'How's Christine?' Rick asked.

'She's sleeping. I gave her some cough syrup.'

Rick lit up a long filter cigarette and got up. He sauntered over to the hallway and waved Susan over. She followed him into the shadows. Rick curled his thumb back at the other room.

'Who is this guy? I've never seen him before.'

'He's a friend of Ray's.'

Rick's lips twisted in distaste.

'But it's not what you think.' She added quickly, 'He's got something for me.'

'Should I stay around?' Rick asked as half a question.

Mike didn't like it. He was holding his gun tightly. Suddenly he felt charged with suspicion-- Who was this dude? He didn't like being excluded from the conversation. The seconds dragged by like minutes as he imagined the different conspiracies that they could be plotting. Mike assured himself that this lame wasn't going to burn him. If this Rick wasn't the buyer, then who was he? Or maybe Rick was the advance man for the buyer. He was unsettled. Strange dudes showing up in the middle of a deal. He tapped his fingernails against the table rim so she would hear him.

Susan's expression hadn't changed but she was dismayed that the man had not arrived yet. There was nothing to do but wait. She had been so long at it she wondered if she ever hadn't been waiting for something to happen. She wanted to salvage something out of this if he didn't come. Maybe Rick could sell a few grams quickly.

'I've got some quick. Fresh! Mike's got an ounce. Have you got any bread?'

Rick put the scene together immediately. He didn't have any money but maybe the guy would front him a spoon. He sure could dig that rush. Rick smiled indulgently at Susan.

'Watch the master at work.' He slouched casually out into the living room.

'Hey Mike.'

Mike's eyes lit up, 'Yeh?'

'I hear you got lots. How about fronting me a spoon. Susan knows I'm good for it.'

For a moment what Rick had said didn't fully register with Mike. Then he was shocked. What the fuck...that dizzy bitch has just given my name and my business to this unknown. He ain't even got any money. Mike jumped up, suddenly energized by his indignation. He smiled faintly as he walked out. 'Don't wait for Christmas, I got to go.'

Mike didn't turn around to see their expressions. The sun was bright again in the street and the path was clear. Next time it'll work out. He kept walking down the sidewalk until he saw their purple car. Raymond's fucking old lady! I should have known better.

The driver's window was rolled down. Pat's hair was slick against his forehead. His broad wolfish face was asking the only important question. In silent reply Mike brought his thumb down Roman emperor style. No go.

At that moment Mike could hear the lyrics from a song on the radio.

' Life in the fast lane really make you lose your mind!

Life in the fast lane everything all the time.

The refrain bounced around then Pat put the car in gear and they pulled out, headed for the golden city.

BOURGEOIS PURITY

'Man in prison is the virtual image of the bourgeois type he still has to become in reality. Those who cannot manage outside are forcibly held in a terrible state of purity in prison.' (Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1944)

The relation of the prison to society is becoming a centre of attention for historians. They see in this relation an important clue to the historically specific strategies of social control. The comforting history of confinement can no longer be seen as a constant, if troubled, progress towards enlightened and humane treatment of the incarcerated. Instead, we are treated to a history of successive impositions of styles of power typical of the societies that create and surround them. In the pithy statement above, Adorno and Horkheimer, two social philosophers on the run from Fascism, foresaw what many contemporary thinkers would confirm. The modern prison is a model of the sometimes hidden and sometimes not so hidden social ideal of middle class life. This 'ideal-type' is by no means pleasant: it is the logical derivation of an individualistic, competitive social ethic. As Victor Serge put it, the modern prison is "the one perfect and irreproachable work of architecture in the modern city...A modern prison--the Spanish more openly call it *Carcel Modelo*, or model prison-- successfully solves the problem of economy in space, labor, and surveillance. Housing a crowd, it effects the total isolation of each individual in that crowd." (V.Serge, *Men in Prison*, 1929).

Historians, social philosophers, revolutionaries like Serge, each have their interest in viewing the prison as a response to history and society. In seeing the prison as a model of existing social relations they will treat it as a part of a larger context of power. The model takes its meaning and significance from its surroundings. Theories about imprisonment and crime will be seen in the same manner; that is, as ideal discourses which assume the legitimacy of existing relationships of power. They are rationalizations, or ideologies, which hide the true nature of the prison from itself. In this case, the trick is to build models of confinement and crime that simply ignore the relationship of the prison to society and its history or which accept prevailing social and political arrangements. Now the prison, the prisoner and the justice system can be treated as entities unto themselves, quite unsullied by the justness or injustice of society at large. These purified models are operational ideals: they help shape social policy and the management of prisons. As Serge said about prison architecture, "(Their) perfection lies in the total subordination of (their) design to (their) function"; that is, to make it work, not to question its very existence.

Ideals are not reality, nor can the concept dog bark. Everyday life in prison is experienced as arbitrary and irrational--in spite of the appearance of order and endless routine. Yet it would be unwise to let experience guide our understanding, here as elsewhere. The literature on prisons reveals numerous models of prison practise. There are medical models, punitive models, jurisprudential models, opportunities models, process models and the living unit model. Some of these are in use, some are but proposals, while others are only rumours. As models they are not wholly embodied in practise; nor could they be. But they can be used as principles for directives on policy, and, by the same logic, they can be used as interpretative keys to actual prison practise. By simplifying the complexities at hand they clarify policy and practise; at the same time they are generous to critics, allowing the gap between theory and practise to come into view. Models claim to

have certain goals after all, and it is useful to test their claims to validity. Models are like bats -- they fly away from the light. Impressions can be formed nevertheless. and if we can employ a term of fashion, the so-called medical model (or therapeutic or treatment model) is definitely passe. This models implies that the criminal is sick and can be cured, usually by experts. Its most valuable legacy is the word 'correctional' itself. The major corollary of this, which seems quite enlightened, is the dawning realization that a cure cannot be coerced. Men cannot be forced to be free, in spite of M. Rousseau and Mr. Bentham. For the moment we must be clear about this: the medical model is in decline in so far as it is merely a model and a rationale for corrections; however, it is still deeply embedded in our institutions and minds. Its continued decline does not imply its disappearance, no more than the medieval preference for punishing the body has disappeared. The real impact of this decline can be measured, however, in the related decline of the rehabilitative ideal. Surveying the state of the rehabilitative art in 1973, Robert Martinson concluded that all such programs had been compromised by linking them to punitive measures; for instance, linking parole to participation in such programs. He then coined the new incantation: "Nothing works". Like every article of faith this was always already known, but it was a relief that God had become Word and he could now be misunderstood.

In 1974 an important book was published that became influential with professionals in the field and even with prisoner reform groups. Norval Morris' *The Future of Imprisonment* (1974) took up the challenge of separating the rehabilitative ideal from the medical model. His essential point was that change in behaviour cannot be coerced but it can be facilitated. Under the medical model the incentive to reform becomes a barrier to the treatment prescribed. One is forced to participate and therefore it is rejected. For Morris, only the volunteer can be rehabilitated. As it stands, he reported, "Prison behaviour is not a predictor of community behaviour". What is to be done? Simple. Programs must continue to be offered, but on an entirely voluntary basis. Prison will do what it can, but it will refuse to claim it is doing anything--except confining the criminal.

Of course, nothing in prison can ever be entirely voluntary. But if we can put that aside for the moment, the proposed solution to the dilemmas of treatment in a coercive setting has its strengths. In Canada facilitative change appeared in less rigorous form in the 'opportunities' model described in *The Role of Federal Corrections in Canada* (1977), subtitled "A Report of the Task Force on the Creation of an integrated Canadian Corrections Service". Again, Corrections provides the opportunities via education, counselling, vocational training, and so on; the prisoner chooses to avail himself of them. Nothing could be more liberal, rational, even realistic -- especially in Morris' well--thought out version. The principle involved seems so benign that hardly anyone could disagree with it. Even radicals could see in it an acceptance of their own critique of the old-fashioned theories of deviant behaviour (all based on some version of the medical model) which had emerged in the cauldron of the sixties. But like much of what appeared radical in 1968, these critiques were watered down in the dawning consensus of the seventies. The opportunities model is no exception, and its very liberality is suspect. Like every other model of confinement, it secretly refuses to put itself in context. Looking at some of the components of the opportunities model, this becomes clear:

1. "The opportunities principle is based on the assumption that the offender is ultimately responsible for his behaviour...(and)...is convicted and sentenced on their basis of some underlying personality disorder or deprived socio-economic condition." (p.31)
2. "Federal Corrections should...strive for a relationship with offenders based on a system of incentives and rewards proportionate to the expressed desire, demonstrated effort and achievement on the part of the inmate." (p.51)
3. "The opportunities must be diversified and relevant in today's society." (p.76)
4. "The Program Opportunities Model makes the offender responsible for changing his conduct; provides Federal Corrections with a realistic goal rather than an unattainable goal of changing offender behaviour; and, does not lead the public to believe that Federal Corrections can resolve the problem of crime." (p.77)
5. "The great majority of offenders are held to know and appreciate the nature and quality of their actions; that is, they possess a full appreciation of the consequences of their actions, the ability to choose alternative courses of action and the capacity to formulate an intent when considering whether or not to commit a criminal offence." (p.32)

These components are only a few of the building blocks inherent in the opportunities model. Yet they do suggest a social model guiding the design of the whole edifice. In broad philosophical terms it is a classical option: a picture of man and society as envisaged by the social contract tradition, a tradition deeply embedded in the rise of the middle class in a market society. Men are viewed as egoistic, autonomous, and rational individuals who come freely together to create civil society. The function of punishment, if course, is to preserve these arrangements. Any punishment which violates the consensus of values established in civil society or which pursue alternative ends (e.g. 'a cure') is illegitimate. In this setting, the individual is responsible for his actions and is equal, no matter what is socio-economic status or character might be, in the eyes of the law. Mitigating circumstances and excuses are irrelevant. Punishment should be proportional to the nature of the crime and the interests violated. This is its utilitarian aspect, which insists that useful activity must be rewarded and destructive activity punished. We are in the market place, where competing, self-interested, rational men pursue the goals of self-possession and the possession of things. Ethical standards are henceforth rooted in the legitimate pursuit of property and personal well-being.

Social contract and utilitarian models like this posit a moral consensus and the permanence of existing mechanisms for the distribution of property. As rational men have already struck a contract on this matter, criminal behaviour is ultimately pathological or irrational. Furthermore, men are equal in their capacity to reason and before the law (i.e. the existence of property and state power). This was always a problem for classical theory, for a system of justice based on principles of equality was only really consistent with a society in which property was distributed evenly. In the moral philosophy that accompanies this model the dilemmas constantly surface. As the American Report of the Committee for the Study of Incarceration (1977) put it:

The Kantian argument presupposes that what violators are being punished for is the infringement of rules that safeguard the rights of all members of a society including the violators own rights. This raises a question...whether a desert-based justification of punishment, such as Kant's, can hold in a society whose penal system helps maintain a less than just social system. (p.47)

If we can accept all of the above, the problems for the very liberal opportunities model immediately surface. In spite of the principle of equality (of opportunity, before the law, etc.), the fact is that men might be imprisoned by virtue of social injustice. Moreover, the justification of imprisonment and the management of sentence necessarily participate in that injustice. The very language of the Task Force Report portrays the correctional institution (i.e. the prison) as a neutral object in the social field. Irresponsible or criminal behaviour in the prison is never seen as response to the nature of the institution and its guiding models. The prison merely takes the criminal out of society and manages his sentence in as fair and equitable manner as possible. But as Morris points out, recidivism is a function of imprisonment.

The age of the prisoner, the availability to him on release of reasonably remunerative employment and of a supportive domestic environment, are closely related to his later avoidance of crime, but these are not circumstances over which the prisoner by his own efforts in prison has very much control. (p.47)

That is, prison separates men and women from the very social ties which bind them to their world; prison is a condition of its own existence. The opportunities model is not adequate to the reality of incarceration in this society because it does not deal with the larger social context of which it is a vital part. The irony is that in disclaiming any active role in changing the prisoner's penchant for criminal action, it sets up a relation of forces not unlike the advocacy model of market society. How did Adorno and Horkheimer put it again? "Those who cannot manage outside are forcibly held in a terrible state of (bourgeois) purity in prison."

WAYNE KNIGHTS.

Deity

I am
the past
the present
the future

I am all
fucked up.